Red in Tooth and Claw

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Summary

Sebastian Moran, an ex-SAS soldier, is looking for independent contract work as an assassin in London's criminal underground. Instead he gets sucked into full-time employment for criminal mastermind Jim Moriarty, which comes with its own risks and rewards. Flirtation ensues... and the story of Moran and Moriarty begins.

A sarcastic ex-soldier who has issues with authority, and a narcissistic psychopath who has issues with everything... how many ways could this go horribly, violently wrong?

Or... beautifully, violently right?
Jim pressed his lips to Sebastian's fiercely, and as he pulled away, nipped his bottom lip.

He looked at the scars on Sebastian’s left side in fascination and trailed his hands over them, feather-soft.

"Apex predator?" he murmured. "Tried to devour you, did he? I can understand how he felt..."

Slowly and sinuously, Jim moved his tongue over the scars.

*The Beginning (One month before)*

Putting a bag over the head of a man with PTSD, unless you'd cuffed – and preferably drugged - him as well, wasn't the most brilliant idea.

He could have told them.

He could have told the two muppets who had been tasked with taking him to this new client, that if their boss was such a secretive and paranoid customer, it would have sufficed to send a middleman.

He could have told them that they had only unwittingly escaped a painful disaster because he as well preferred to meet the people behind the contracts face to face...

and because the rush of adrenaline in the face of danger (or what his body, mind and instincts perceived as such) acted like a fix … calming him.

Or maybe not - maybe he couldn't have told them this last reason, because the finer mechanisms of these conditions wasn't something that Sebastian Moran cared to dissect or even to acknowledge.

He just muttered “...fuck's sake!” when he bumped his head as they bundled him into the back seat of a car without kindly taking into consideration that he was taller than most and he couldn't SEE – which was just the point in these kind of proceedings, right?!

He sounded mildly annoyed. Someone apologised. Although he could not see anything, he knew the drive had lasted half an hour (turn the radio off next time, guys!). There wasn't really much more information to glean, just the sluggish traffic and the frequency of stops suggested they were still in the city when there was a short dip, like the entrance to some underground car park.

The hood didn't come off until after an elevator ride and he had been taken out through the doors. Blue-green eyes blinked, adjusting to the light and the goon who had removed the blindfold must have seen something in Sebastian’s glare that made him step back a little.

Would Sebastian have been prone to insecurity or feeling out of place, now would have been a moment to do so: T-Shirt, Jeans, leather jacket and in scuffed boots on this absolutely pristine carpet.

But he wasn't, and he didn't.

What he did though was second nature to him, in any room or place: he took in his surroundings - people, windows, doors, walls, potential weapons, cover, exits, blind spots - but without making a
show of it. Impressive digs. Posh.

“The manners of your two watchdogs are somewhat... lacking,” he observed casually, while his gaze returned to the only other person in the huge room - studying him with a calm confidence.

At first glance this man looked just like an accountant (a young, smart and very high-end accountant, he'd give him that) - but at the same time there was something about him that literally made his teeth itch a little bit … and left a slight prickle across the back of his neck (or under it?), strangely feeling hot and cold at the same time. But accountants of HM Revenue and Customs had as much tendency to take out hits on socially prominent targets as Sebastian Moran did to annually file his income taxes.

“So who are you?” It didn't cross his mind for even a moment to introduce himself - not out of rudeness, but the simple fact that the man knew who he was, as he had Sebastian brought to him.

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Jim was very familiar with the man standing on his carpet now, although they'd never properly met. He knew him from photos in his file - some looking as he did now, some in military dress, and some - ooh. Well, suffice it to say, Sebastian Moran was so beautiful, everybody wanted him - which in his case made him an absolute slut - and he had taken to dropping his trousers left, right and centre since he got into London. Jim had the photos to prove it - in alleys, in nightclub toilets, in cars... Moran seemed to enjoy public sex, although his investigators did also get some nice shots through windows.

Jim also knew him from video footage captured by his men... oh, he could watch for hours and not tire of Moran in action. (The stamina... the aggression...)

There were also several video cameras installed in Moran’s apartment where he got to see Sebastian in various states of undress and solo sexual activity. My god, the man had a high sex drive…

And more recently Jim was familiar with Moran from appearing in disguise at the places he knew the man would be, based on intercepted information from his calls, texts and e-mails. He always liked to observe subjects for himself. You got something from in-person surveillance that photos and videos just couldn't capture.

So Jim knew what Sebastian Moran sounded like when he had an orgasm, when he’d arrived at a gay bar just in time to see Sebastian Moran lead another muscular man to the toilets. Moran certainly had made that man groan in pleasure loudly enough...

To look at the fine specimen of manhood before him now... Jim was rather impressed with himself for being able to look at him with an impassive expression, when all he could do was picture him making some of those faces underneath him, making those sounds... but no, this was a professional meeting for purely professional reasons.
Thoughts of ferocious sex with Sebastian Moran were irrelevant and almost completely out of the question.

"Who am I? I'm disappointed, that's who I am... you mean to tell me you really don't know?" He *tsked* at the tall man before him, and wandered about on the carpet in a deceptively casual manner, while looking at his own nails.

"You were the one making *enquiries*, my dear... surely if you learned anything with the skill that I'm told you have, you should be able to hazard a guess? A teensy-weensy, tiny little guess? For me?" Jim pouted, then stopped in front of him abruptly.


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A few contracts had come his way, but overall, progress had been infuriatingly slow. Be it middlemen suddenly backing out, or even a client having been 'warned off.' And throughout all this it was one name Sebastian seemed to run into time and again... of someone, some *thing* all the strings that controlled the dark underbelly of this huge metropolis ran to.

Of course he had been intrigued (even more than annoyed), and of course he had enquired... But from anyone he'd pointblank *asked*, there had been such a hushed silence or reluctance or maybe even sheer inability to answer, it left the impression it wasn't a person or even an organisation he'd enquired about, but a downright monstrous deity.

But yes, he started to get an inkling that his poking around had sent some signal along the threads and strings to the centre of... a *web*.

His mouth had gone a little bit dry. If he listened to his instincts, and mostly he did, he'd need to step very carefully now, because this man might really be...

Instead he heard himself casually suggest: “CEO of Yazco Carpet Ltd.?“

As the other man meandered about, talking with his deceptively pleasant Irish lilt, inspecting his manicured nails.

“*I've* been enquiring about a lot of things lately,” Sebastian added calmly, “*what with* being new in town and all that.“

He tensed when his host stopped in front of him abruptly, personal space a concept he either was unacquainted with or deliberately chose to ignore. Sebastian managed not to flinch, feeling as though he was under the gaze of some poisonous predatory creature that made you want to snatch back all your fingers and toes - and simultaneously hypnotised you into freezing.

Alright. He did get a second shot. Wisely he decided to forego further quips as well as any visible reaction to this highly irritating pet-name-dropping.
Jim smiled at this. The tone his name was spoken with always carried such awe and dread and he never tired of it, ever....

It almost made up for the snarky comment a moment ago. Someone's begging for it... and god, could he deliver it. An image of Sebastian Moran, gagged and tied up in his bedroom, flashed through Jim's mind.

I want to slap that pretty face, he thought, quickly followed by, No - hands off this one, I think.

Good men who could survive Jim's wrath were difficult to find (and hold onto). Moran was supposed to be the best... and Jim was very interested in the best.

So he put thoughts aside of fucking him or shedding his blood on the carpet (or both - in either order, really), and just stood and stared at him with a mad smile. He could tell by people's reactions just how mad his smile was, as well as their tolerance for chaos. Moran seemed cautious and concerned, but unafraid.

Interesting...

"There's a job tomorrow. If you perform your role to my satisfaction, we'll continue from there. The information you'll require will come to you by nightfall. That will be your one and only opportunity to turn it down. Think very hard if you want to pursue this path, ex-Colonel Moran. You're not in the military anymore, and the only rules that apply are what the King of the Castle decides. Does that sound like fun?"

Jim watched the tall man's face closely. He sang out, "Because we're nothing if not fun here..." before turning on his heel and walking up the stairs.

"Oh, look - your ride is here." He lifted his arm and snapped his fingers.

The same men from before appeared with the bag. Jim climbed the stairs, listening for reactions or parting words.

Don't disappoint me, Sebastian Moran, he thought... I hate being disappointed...

And there's only one thing worse than disappointment... and that's being bored.
So now they came to what seemed to be the heart of the matter – a job offer (except somehow it didn't sound like an offer).

And why did Moriarty's turn of phrase continue to so annoy him? How was it the word *perform* conjured the image of something you auctioned off at a breeding stock sale, or did tricks in a circus. Or the menagerie of a king, in this case...

“Depends on the king, really,” he answered blandly. And if Moriarty knew so much about him as he apparently did, he also knew how much of a problem Sebastian Moran had with kings. And rules.

Hell, with a lot of things…

Well, he *did* know, didn't he? The dark eyes scrutinized him, still so close there was even a whiff of aftershave. Crisp. Heady.

Sebastian, nearly startled by the soft, but decidedly mad singsong announcement that they were *nothing if not fun here*... pulled himself together.

He had the strange, intoxicating and yet slightly nauseating feeling of the world shifting slightly beneath his feet - with the direction depending on his decision.

Fuck, clear reasoning now... and nothing else! He could think better now that Moriarty had moved away, effectively dismissing him.

“Let's see if I got this straight… If I take this job, I am to take whichever comes after too?” Sebastian summarized. “And if I don’t... hm. For some strange reason I can't seem to get as much as a foot in the door freelancing in this fair city.”

It was vexing, that this man seemed to have the power to control something like this in a vast organism like the City of London - if it even ended there - as if on a mere whim. So not just fascinating, but mind-boggling, really...

“So - presumably I don't have much of a choice?”

Like hell he didn't!

He shrugged. “Ah well... Paris is nice this time of year, too.”

As was São Paolo. Or Timbuktu, for that matter. Assuming (but maybe incorrectly) that was far enough...?

He turned as well, resigning himself to the fucking hood again, when the men who were to escort him out reappeared. He stared into darkness on the elevator ride down. Darkness - but not near as deep as...

*God, those eyes*... even thinking of them sent a wave of searing cold and molten heat through him. They appeared pitch-black like... no, not the cliché of the *bottomless pits* - they were anything but. There was a glint in their depths, and it might well be from sharpened stakes.

He could pretend to use the time given for consideration. But whom was he fooling... He already knew: Moriarty would point, and Moran would shoot.
Jim rolled his eyes at the Paris comment, but didn't bother to respond as he continued to climb the stairs. He'd heard enough of his phone conversations to know Moran was a smart-arse. Still, he'd have thought the man would have known not to mouth off to him if he wanted to live long...

Jim considered this as he walked into his office and sat down at his laptop. He could understand having some attitude if someone had the skills to back it up... which Moran clearly did, given his records. Jim ignored the work that was waiting for him, and opened up the file which housed the photos and videos of the subject in question. He clicked through photos of Moran walking down the street... carrying groceries or beer… riding a motorcycle... with an ever-present cigarette hanging out of his mouth, dressed much as he was today.

The earlier photos of him in military dress sent a feeling through Jim that he was unfamiliar with - almost like a tremor. Idly he found himself wondering if Moran even owned a proper suit and what he'd look like in one.

Then he was onto the photos of Moran in his apartment - shirtless in jeans... wearing only a towel...

Jim abruptly closed the file, opened up a messaging forum on the dark web.

He quickly confirmed with one of his men which documents and instructions were to be sent to Moran tonight.

Then he glared at the file on his desktop, and slammed the lid of his laptop down.

Tomorrow, he'd have his answer. Either Moran would back out, in which case he'd never have to think of him again.

Or he'd perform the test poorly, in which case there would be no more dealings with him - ever.

Or he'd succeed...

And if he succeeded... Jim found himself rubbing his lip absent-mindedly, and pulled his hand away from his face in irritation.

If he became a regular contractor, Jim would hand off dealings with him to someone else.

It seemed doubtful he would become a full-time employee with his attitude towards authority - he wouldn't survive a bloody hour.

Jim found his fingers drumming loudly on the desk, and forced his hand to rest on his lap.

Jesus - what was under his skin today?? Whatever it was, he needed some nice, relaxing mayhem to shake it off...

He opened up his laptop, clicked the folder labelled Special Projects. He could feel his eyes gleaming as he eyed the files.

Where to begin....

He clicked on a file, lovingly stroke the keys of the laptop, and a smile spread slowly across his face.
Normally when there was any problem or decision to be made, a run helped clear his mind, even reset it - this time it only seemed to make his mind stumble after a decision had already been made in his gut (or another region distant from the brain).

Because amongst all the plans and strategies Sebastian Moran had considered when coming to London to set up... absolutely none included any kind of permanent employment, long-term contracts or even retainers. He was done with being at the beck and call of... anyone, really.

And yet, there was no denying that the world he'd been part of for so many years, was like a ... habitat. His habitat. Where it wasn't just necessary or required to kill but... natural. A world not without laws, but the ones of war and survival - life and death, order and savagery in close proximity.

He'd been born for it.

And he hadn't been consciously aware of this sense of belonging until it was gone.

Even when everything here in London had started to get into gear nicely (before all the unnerving hitches and snags had started coming his way), his new life was permeated by a sense of... drifting. Drifting from what he was used to. From what every fibre of his being was honed to do. Only for the short time between the odd contract and the hit, did a sense of purpose return to him – only for the duration of the stalk, the chase, the kill.

So even if his mind came up with very sane reasons to stay away from Moriarty, it was fighting a losing battle. It was like... standing near a precipice in a dream - and despite knowing to keep your distance... finding yourself walking right over...

There was a deafening crash and a shower of glass - a green sedan, after being rammed in the side by a lorry, was catapulted across the pavement and into a shop window. And this was just the starting shot for all hell to break loose. It took a moment to register but he realised that the only lights were from moving – or rather apocalyptically entangling – traffic. Any other illumination, traffic lights included, were snuffed out... The ensuing chaos was tremendous, and when Sebastian reached for his phone, as did loads of other people around him – he found it to be out of service.

What he also found, after he'd finally made it home, was a thick brown envelope behind the door of his flat...

Jim watched his laptop, transfixed by the images before him. Videos were streaming in from around the city of the chaos being unleashed by Special Project C. The generators on standby in his building weren't strictly necessary - the arrangement reached with key people overseeing the power grid were sufficient to ensure his street would be without power never.

He watched enraptured as a bus careened down the street, slammed into a streetlight and brought the
pole partway down - hanging precariously over the street, the defunct light swung widely and made loud squeaking sounds. It was downright cinematic... the bus was smoking and then caught fire - people were running away as the light plummeted to the ground in a spectacular crash. The bright flare of the flames and the sounds of screaming were an especially nice touch. A laugh exploded from him, and his eyes widened in surprise. It was rare to laugh these days unless it was part of a performance. He grinned in delight at the screen, and leaned back in his chair.

Things had been so BORING lately - even escalating the crazy and terrifying people didn't give the same pleasure it used to.

Maybe that's why he'd gotten a little carried away with this whole surveillance business with Moran.

And the test... would prove challenging to pass. It wasn't even about passing - it was about how he handled it when he failed. It's the same he would do for any potential employee or contractor, but admittedly he'd really pulled out all the stops with Moran. It was almost as if he wanted an excuse to not hire him. Frivolous, he chided himself - he could have found a good use for him regardless of Moran’s little issues with authority...

Jim looked over the details of the test - standard scenario as far as Moran would be concerned re. target, location, timing. What he wouldn't be expecting was the assassin showing up on the rooftop at the exact time when he was supposed to be taking the kill shot.

And if he escaped that - with a terrorist threat being called into police, either SO19 or the Counter Terrorism SFOs would be dropping by to give him their regards.

Jim laughed loudly for the second time that evening. Jesus Christ, Moriarty - isn't that overkill for a fucking sniper? Ah, well. Moran mouthed off to him twice - so there were two little hurdles for him to jump over. Should be an interesting day tomorrow, whatever happened. He headed for his bedroom, grinning wildly.

The twingey, unsettling feeling in his chest went mostly ignored.

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To know in theory was one thing, but to experience it, to be in the middle of it, that was something else... It was stunning, really - how a first world metropolis could be nearly brought to its knees or at least be sent reeling, by something as simple like a major blackout. Maybe one couldn't go as far as to say that gridlocked London wasn't that different from today's Aleppo... but there was an air of anarchy about it, an undercurrent of chaos, of danger, subtly getting stronger further into the night. A hint of civilisation unravelling at the seams, a glimpse of how thin its fabric really was.

Quite intoxicating… and Sebastian breathed in deeply, inhaled it along with the smoke of his cigarette as he cut across the city on foot to do his own recon. As he always did before a hit. No matter how deficient or how well-prepared the details he'd been given seemed to be.

The ones Moriarty had sent - and Sebastian had read with the help of torchlight – were meticulous: location, schedule, photos of the target, and even the best position to take the shot from (with a map and stunning satellite images corroborating it was the best place, maybe even the only one possible, as Sebastian saw it.) With the target supposedly in his office the whole afternoon tomorrow, he had wondered briefly why in God's name the kill was to happen at 14.30 sharp. Whatever - if it pleased
the bo- the bossy little fucker. He couldn't have cared less if the man planned the demise of his enemies consulting a horoscope or the Mayan calendar.

The only real snag he saw, as he stood on the moonlit rooftop surveying the scene and the building in question, was the wind. It had been getting consistently stronger during the last hours and could present a real problem tomorrow if it didn't let up. After a last look around and a few preparations he slipped into the stairwell and left.

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Jim looked over his various reports - the updated tallies of accidents, damage to property, deaths, injuries, fires... the lists went on and on. There were endless streams of data, including the shortlist of reasons for the power outage in the first place.

The only thing that was not included in these lists and reports was a discernable pattern, an understanding that this could have been caused by one person with an agenda and a blistering grudge against society. Because there was indeed method to the madness of last night - a very valuable item was obtained from a vault, and by the time it was realized that it was missing, it was unlikely that it would be traced back to the blackout - except perhaps as a criminal seizing an opportunity that presented itself. Certainly not creating their own opportunity through a massive and destructive operation (for who would do such a thing)!

But the real truth was, obtaining the item was the secondary reason for the incident. The primary reason, so pure in its simplicity, was mayhem. Watching society function within its narrow little parameters was like watching an ant farm for hours and hours - sooner or later one was tempted to pour gasoline into it, light a match and watch it burn.

Jim glanced at the time. Moran's hit was scheduled to happen shortly. He was looking forward to receiving data from this as well. Especially because police forces would be on high alert after yesterday's little power fiasco.

*Good luck, Moran..." Jim thought, then raised a glass of red wine high in the air. Poor bastard...

He took a sip of the wine. "Tell you what, my dear... You survive this, and I'll offer you full-time employment. All you have to do is not get killed or arrested - that should be easy-peasy for a big, strong soldier like you..."

He found himself pulling out his mobile and tapping out a text.

_How's the wind up there? Lovely day for an assassination! JM_
was a sure-fire method to being seen.

Even though it couldn't be avoided here, he had at least found some degree of cover by setting up between the structures of the huge air vents servicing the building, about an hour ago.

The position afforded a good line of sight to the target. And also to the length of barrier tape he'd torn off and pocketed last night when passing a building site. It was now tied to the rails of a fire escape and gave him – literally - a livestream observation of the wind. And it didn't flap around but was more or less fucking horizontal. One moment Sebastian eyed it with disgust, and the next pleadingly, as if he could will it to stop. But from everything he'd seen on the forecast he knew it wouldn't. Fucking shit.

In any other circumstances the shot would be difficult, but doable. With this kind of wind in an urban environment, prone to even shift and change speed and direction between buildings, it was nearly impossible.

Using windmeter, chart and intuition he had clicked the dials on his scope to a setting to compensate. It would have him effectively aiming twenty feet above and twelve and a half to the left of his target, and if the wind gusted or dropped the moment he took the shot, he wouldn't just miss the target or even the window, but the entire fucking building.

And then there was the matter of said window.

Even with all ducks aligned and all friggin' stars in a row, there was no way to factor the deflection by the laminated glass into the account.

The only sensible thing to do, the only thing possible really, would be to pack up, go home, and return another time. As he would have done on any given day, working on his own clock and schedule. Which he still was, he reminded himself, and that irritating little mick could just...

The phone in his pocket vibrated and he fished it out, taking his eye off the scope.

*How's the wind up there? Lovely day for an assassination!* JM

Sebastian blinked. Then he just gritted his teeth. Apparently Moriarty wasn't the kind of guy who needed to be given your number to just … have it. Quelling the impulse to hurl the device against the next best wall, Sebastian typed a reply.

*Breezy. SM*

Then he turned the phone off altogether and - settled his cheek back against the stock of his rifle.

Although he was trying to push everything and everyone from his mind, he was still arguing with himself what the fuck he was still doing here, when there was a new development. The target, who had been working on his desk for half an hour stepped to the window and … opened it. Lighting a cigarette. Now everything else *was* completely gone from Sebastian's mind.

He could hardly believe what he saw. If there was any moment to take the shot at all, it was now.
Sebastian Moran and his rifle melted into one organism, the stock nestling in the crook of his shoulder, his eye against the scope. His finger gently squeezing the trigger, then resting against the last tiny hair of resistance. Two even, slightly deeper breaths. The second exhale relaxing into stillness.

The man in the crosshairs exhaled too, the smoke whisked into nothingness by the steady strong wind.

The sound of the shot as well, no more than a muffled crack.

The recoil bucked against Sebastian's shoulder. Absorbed. Savoured.

The man at the window moved his hand, brought the cigarette to his mouth again. Took another drag. Savouring it. One second, two...

The glowing tip bloomed into a spray of red.

It was 14:25.

Which, as he realized later, was probably the one reason he'd made it off that rooftop alive. With all senses heightened and awareness of his surroundings returning, the movement caught out of the corner of his eye registered for what it was, quicker than any rational observation: Someone stepping through the door onto the roof, everything in the posture, the way to move so familiar to Sebastian, it could not have screamed a louder warning. Whoever that was - it was not the chimney sweep.

His body reacted before even his mind could shake itself out of freeze mode - he was hurling himself aside, bits of concrete peppering his neck even as he rolled, torn out from two deep, neat notches that appeared in the spot he'd just been in not a second ago. He gained his knees, his feet, and scrambled around another corner, the wall of a water tank - his rifle far out of reach but currently it would be as useful as tits on a nun, anyway.

The layout of the roof etched into his mind, he tried to guess the way the assassin would come at him again, purely on instinct. He discounted the most likely, doubled back, and, darting around the air vents, came up behind the man. Who was a fraction too slow to completely turn and take better aim, before Sebastian jumped him and they crashed to the ground together. The silenced Glock clattered and skidded away.

The ensuing fight was brutal and silent, snarls and grunts barely audible above the howling wind. It contained every dirty trick in the book (and those which were not). At one stage Sebastian, taking a blow, suppressing the instinctive response of deflecting it, went with the momentum and finally got his opponent into a choke hold. With never enough leeway to completely turn and take better aim, he had no other option than to viciously hold on, trying to twist out of the way of the knife which was now involved as well.

It was only after the man had finally shuddered and gone limp, that he got a first glance at his face. Eastern European, by the look of him, and a total stranger.

Sebastian knelt over him, breathing heavily, shaken, nauseated by the punch that had brought the side of his head and his cheek into close contact with the concrete; that was the moment he heard the sirens. An everyday sound in the streets of London, now distorted and torn by the wind, but unmistakably very close. He staggered to his feet and a glimpse over the parapet confirmed: a whole convoy of flashing lights pulling up.
He swore. He swore to kill the little Irish fuckwit, because he had stopped - exactly four and a half minutes ago – believing there was chance or coincidence in anything happening here …

There was only one way left to exit the building, and if he was to have the slightest chance to make it, he couldn't take his rifle. But maybe he could cause enough mayhem, shock and confusion to help him get away. He picked up his rifle, then he dragged the lifeless assassin to the edge of the roof. With much more remorse for one than the other, he tipped both over the low parapet.

He dodged back, not waiting to see the effect, and scrambled down the fire escape to the next roof… Six houses, several ripped fingernails and a twisted ankle later he finally found an open skylight, just when he heard the still distant but familiar thumping noise of an approaching helicopter.

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Jim's fingers were drumming along the desk again when he received the call.

Target dead. Sniper and weapon found on the ground. Police investigating identities of the bodies.

His fingers stopped drumming, and his mouth opened.

"Is that it?" he asked coolly. "Let me know any more updates," he said and hung up.

Jim found himself closing down the windows he had open on his laptop. His finger paused over the Moran file and then he clicked.

He looked at each and every photo. Jim had been looking forward to their next meeting, he realized. Moran didn't seem... boring.

And now - he was nothing. Because of Jim's little games...

He felt sensations begin to move through him, and they did not feel good... heat... darkness... the feeling of something crawling through him, whispering something about... blame.

He made a noise in his throat - this was ridiculous. He was frequently responsible for people's deaths... and he had to assure quality control when it came to employees... and... Moran would have likely been boring in the end... everyone was. Everyone.

And Jim was alone - again.

Always alone.

He shoved his laptop away, and pulled open his desk drawer. He grabbed the Beretta, and shot the window repeatedly.

Moments later there was a pounding on his door, and a head popped in.

"Sir, are you -" one of Jim's security team popped his head in. "OK?" he finished lamely, staring at the shot-up window.
"Peachy," Jim snapped, slamming his gun on the desk. "Don't I look like everything's pean?"

The man's face grew pale. "Do you want us to - call to have the window fixed?"

"NO, I want us to make mosaics together out of the broken glass. Jesus... get out and have it taken care of," he snarled, and the man fled the room.

Moran wouldn’t have acted like that, Jim thought. Irritation surged through him. *Fuck's sake, Jim - you didn't know the man! He's dead. Move on.*

He forced himself to close the folder, but couldn't bring himself to delete it. He returned to a work folder, and stared blankly at it.

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With law enforcement out in droves and several streets being cordoned off, the scale of the resulting chaos was nowhere near that of last night's blackout. But in the end it was something that rather helped than hindered Sebastian, once he was down on street level again - outside the perimeter the police had set up. He took care to not run into anyone who might take a closer look at him, but then again, he didn't have anything incriminating on him. The concrete-kissed side of his face mostly obscured by the hood of his jacket, hands in pockets, he just walked.

And for the time being, they might not even look for someone who was walking. Of course, soon they would piece it all together. But for now...?

That was actually another beauty of yesterday's mayhem, which probably still had every conceivable unit on high alert, falling all over each other when a threat was called in. To every onlooker it must have seemed like SCO19 had already stormed the building and made short work of the gunman. They themselves, still on the ground, might reason that maybe some clandestine snipers, already on neighbouring rooftops had neutralised the threat – law enforcement units were not always working hand in hand, smoothly coordinating their efforts – rather the opposite. Also, there wasn’t much left of a human body dropped from a sixteen storey height. Still, the coroner and forensics would come to the conclusion that rifle and man had not been together initially.

More for the formal sake of *good assassination practice* he threw in some counter-surveillance measures on the way home, but to be honest, he couldn't be bothered too much. He was seething.

He’d been double-crossed before, but never, ever like this. When the red hot rage lifted a bit, he still couldn't fathom as to the why. If Moriarty wanted to have him killed or taken off his turf, no doubt he could have had just that, quicker than Sebastian would have known what hit him and without such an elaborate ruse...

Back home he loosened the segment of panelling that was hiding his gun cabinet, before it came
back to him he didn't _have_ a gun to stow away. Swearing a blue streak he kicked the piece of drywall so hard he put a hole in it.

He threw off his jacket, lit a cigarette and smoked it while getting out of the rest of his clothes as well. He paused, glaring at the phone that fell into his hand, and switched it back on. After a deep gulp of Jameson straight from the bottle he went to take a shower and see to his injuries. Halfway to the bathroom he turned, snatched the bottle from the sideboard again and took it with him.

~

Work felt boring... _everything_ felt boring!! He'd been anticipating his next interaction with Moran, and now he was being _denied_...

Fury rose in Jim - how _dare_ Moran disappoint him? He'd expected _more_ from him... and he failed a simple test so quickly??

_Pathetic_...

He glared at his phone, and snatched it up.

Closure. He needed closure, or he was going to shoot more than the window.

He called Moran's number so he could scream his displeasure at a dead man. And then he'd be done with all this foolishness - he'd delete the damn photographs and life would go on.

_Ring_

_Ring_

"Leave a message" Jim heard him say tersely, followed by a long beep.

_Not very social, was he_, he thought. Then hearing himself refer to Moran in a past tense, he felt furious all over again.

"Well, Moran - I hear you made it as far as the ground," he said in a nasty voice. "I have to say, I'm _disappointed_... I expected more from you than that, darling. I guess my little test saved me the aggravation of working with someone who couldn't handle a few complications... And _some_ complications can be so... enjoyable, can't they?" he purred. Where the fuck was he going with this?? Was he flirting posthumously???(Fuck's sake, Moriarty!)

"Anyway! Your next assignment is cancelled due to your utter failure to pass the test, and your _ridiculously disappointing demise_. Enjoy your stay in hell," he snarled, and stabbed the End button.

_Seriously_, Jimmy? he thought. Worst angry message for a dead man _ever_...
His phone rang.

Whipping around, he threw the gauze drenched with disinfectant and blood into the sink, shot into the living room and grabbed the phone.

_number withheld_

Which was very much the usual on this display, but – he knew, he just... **knew**...

Well, of course he didn't; but there was no way he could talk to anyone coherently right now. Even if it wasn't **him**.

If it **was**...

He was so white with rage, his jaw muscles probably wouldn't even relax sufficiently to let anything out other than a snarl. Jesus bloody Christ, just **picturing** the little shit seemed enough to give him a coronary. And if he was able to talk, with what he **would** say, well - it wouldn't be just one fucker with a gun sent after him the next time. Before he could return the courtesy.

The phone had stopped ringing a while ago, he realized now. He breathed deeply, put it back on the table. Then picked it up again, and hit the speed dial for his mailbox. It wouldn't be Moriarty, anyway, because everybody still presumed he was dead, surely. So what reason would there be ...

Well, listening to the recorded message, he was enlightened. By a voice so caustic it was practically melting his ear. He even forgot to breathe while listening to this rant of a deranged madman to the mailbox of a dead man - nothing short of desecrating the corpse.

And suddenly Sebastian felt an extreme calm settle over him. Serenity, almost. Like relaxing into the exhale, just before the kill.

He saved the message and was about to put the phone back, when it rang again.

He let it ring twice, then took the call.

"Don't leave a message," he said pleasantly.

~

Jim went still.

He thought for a moment that he called the wrong number. (No. Didn't.)

Then he thought that maybe it was a different outgoing message than before, which made **no bloody sense**.

Then he thought nothing at all because of all the white noise in his head.

*He's... alive?*

His breath caught in his throat.
"Moran??" he gripped the phone hard. "What. The. Fuck."

~

God ... probably not many ever got to hear that ... That voice, so absolutely, totally thrown off its usual cadence, off-kilter, its owner audibly, absolutely confounded (even but for one moment) ... that was nearly worth everything.

Sebastian found himself grinning wildly, and he was biting the side of his tongue to regain a straight face, before he spoke again.

"Yep. Well, good of you to call, really..." he went on cheerily. "See, here I was, wondering ..." he picked up a cigarette, lit, inhaled deeply and went on, "wondering how I was to find you... with no means of contact and you thinking me dead and all... So - " he took another drag, talking around the cigarette, "glad you stand by your job offer. Always ready to work with someone up for the complication of a ridiculously disappointing demise. So - " another pull on his cigarette, "when do I start? Tomorrow?"

~

Jim stopped himself from saying, "You're alive??"

Just barely.

Instead he inhaled, composed himself and making sure to sound bored with just a hint of amusement, said, "Oh, I'm so happy to oblige you, Moran... You'll receive details tomorrow about your contract and first job. And Moran...?" he heard only quiet breathing on the other end of the line. "Don't disappoint me again."

He hung up, smiling faintly. It sounded threatening, yes - but it was up to Moran if he wanted to read into that or not.

He threw himself back against his office chair, and leaned so as to tilt it back, then proceeded to twirl about looking at the ceiling.

Sarcastic fucker, he thought in annoyance, but couldn't suppress the corner of his mouth lifting up into a grin.

~

The screaming, decidedly unhinged madman was gone as if nothing had happened, and the voice back to the smooth Kerrygold lilt. It took Sebastian a moment to process what it was saying.

He... - wait... what? First job tomorrow? As in: he'd thrown in a free kill at a job interview, that on
top of that had been designed with very good odds to get him killed as well?

Also, never before had Sebastian encountered somebody who'd left a death threat go so utterly and completely ignored. It threw him.

*Who the fuck do you think you are, you presumptuous little prick? God?*

Thing was, something told him that this sounded about right, and that it was he himself who should be thankful that his threat had been ignored – like something that had never been uttered.

And so, for once, he didn't say another peep before the call was ended.

It was only after another swig from the bottle and having returned to his bathroom field hospital that he could admit to himself, that despite everything, he hadn't felt so alive in a long time as he had in the last twenty-four hours, and not as elated since passing selection. A stripling trooper hellbent on proving himself and...

And yet here he was, more than a bloody decade later, and so needled by the mere allusion of 'disappointing' because he ... (Fucking shit! He ripped the last two butterfly strips off a freshly taped cut again, because it looked an absolute mess) ... seemed to crave the approval of a bloody lunatic!

He taped the wound again and then looked into the mirror to at last clean the roughed-up side of his face. After that he grimaced slightly to check if any of the cuts would start bleeding again.

Suddenly he stopped, glaring at his reflection in the mirror.

"You disappoint me, Moran," he sang under his breath, in a dead-on imitation, "You're such an eejit."

~

Jim went over the information that would be sent to Moran tomorrow. No little tricks this time... as much as he enjoyed them, Sebastian Moran had proved himself more than capable.

God, would he have loved to have seen footage of the man's work on the rooftop... his neutralization of the threat (*clever* fucker, making it appear he was the one who fell!)... and his slippery escape from converging police forces.

He logged into one of his own bank accounts, and transferred a very generous sum to Moran's account. He'd more than earned it. (No doubt he'd be surprised that Jim knew his account, given that it was under an alias - but Moran would get used to these things soon enough.)

Suddenly his own words from earlier came crashing through his mind: "Tell you what, my dear... You survive this, and I'll offer you full-time employment."

Ah, yes - well, he would certainly make the offer. God knows if Moran would turn it down, or take it only in order to make good on his threat to kill him. Cheeky little shit. Jim genuinely laughed for the second time that evening.

Well - he might need some convincing, and Jim was happy to make the effort for such a fine, capable man. An image of Moran flashed through his mind - on his knees, hands restrained, being railed by
Jim - and just as quickly it was stifled. No - he wouldn't make the same mistakes he'd made with a couple of previous employees in past years. It never ended well for them, and Jim had grown vexed with looking for replacements...

But the very least he could do was pop by for a visit during Moran's job tomorrow... they could have a little chat in the interest of reconciliation, and wouldn't that just be sweet as jam?

Jim completed the transaction with a flourish. Click

Under ‘Reference’, he had included the words:

(Henry V, Act III, Scene VII)

*Give the devil his due.*

~

Sebastian stared at the screen and the figure that had gone into his bank account – his fucking *Johnny Madden* account at that. Somehow the question of where the money had come from didn't even present itself. It was signed – literally. And you didn't even have to know your Shakespeare, just a few good old-fashioned fairytales to make your skin prickle and the tiny hairs on the back of your neck rise.

_Someone_ presumed the deal already done.

Heck, there was some explanation as to how that someone had gotten his hands on his phone number – if you knew where to look it was just out there - but … _this_?? An unnerving question that _did_ arise was: what else...? A thought struck Sebastian and he leaned back on his chair and surveyed the room. He was about to discount his hunch as paranoia, when amongst the stacks of books on the shelf he noticed one that wasn't his.

As it turned out, it wasn't even a book at all, but a dummy housing a tiny camera. He ripped it out and studied it. He was no expert, but he knew a thing or two about surveillance gear. Video stream, probably triggered by motion or sound, so not using up energy and just on standby the rest of the time...

It took him nearly two hours, and he found four: hallway, living room, bathroom (*Seriously? Nothing if not thorough, you intrusive little fucker... aren't you?*) and number four – yup, bedroom. He stretched up and fumbled it out of the unused light fixture in the corner above the bed.

“Seen anything you like?” he growled softly, and was about to kill the thing, but then he paused, pointing the tiny lens back at his face.

“Dear viewer,” he announced with a smile. “Due to data protection issues this broadcast can not continue. But we're happy to say due to the substantial contribution you've made towards the upkeep of this station, it is possible to keep the soundtrack of this channel up and running."

Then he just turned the little gadget so it faced the ceiling.
Jim had done a couple more hours of work and it was almost time for bed. He had quickly grown used to watching streamed video footage of Moran before he slept, finding it strangely soothing. So as he cued up the media player, he got to witness Moran finding all the cameras, and even saying hello.

Oh well, it was fun while it lasted, he thought, chuckling to himself. Tomorrow there would be manly posturing and accusations flung about, and then Moran would quickly come around to Jim's way of seeing things - everybody did (or everybody died).

Only - he wasn't tearing the video camera in the bedroom out from the light fixture and crushing it. He was - turning it upside down? So Jim could hear but not see? For what purpose?? What did Sebastian want Jim to hear?!

Jim stared at the video screen in outrage and fascination.

Well, Moran? he thought. You've got my attention! Say something!! Do something!!

~

Even if you were a bit of a control freak – or just meticulously screening your potential employees - there wasn't any need to bug someone's bedroom or shower! So there was enough outrage sweeping through Sebastian (maybe something else too, that he didn't care to acknowledge…) that it didn't even cross his mind that the cameras might have been there much longer than he thought.

He hadn't, to his recollection, brought anyone home with him in weeks. He rarely did. Sebastian Moran's sexual encounters were of the kind that mostly didn't make it as far as a bedroom - rather just the car, the toilets of a club, or the next best wall. There was the matter of urgency of course, but also a more sober and serious underlying reason. The difference between sleeping with someone you didn't really know and going to sleep beside them afterwards wasn't just a matter of semantics, but of safety, pure and simple. So instead of facing the tedium of throwing someone out of your bed and flat after you'd just dragged them in for a shag, he tended to avoid this bother altogether.

He didn't tonight.

Even in his current state he didn't have the slightest problem picking someone up at the nearest gay bar – quite the opposite. The type of guy drawn to a roughed-up face was prerequisite for the kind of tumble Sebastian fiercely enjoyed. And this time he couldn't have said what he found more thrilling: the sex itself or the thought of the little voyeur of the pitch-black eyes, who would have nothing but the ceiling to look at while listening in.

And God, Sebastian made sure the soundtrack was beautiful...

He had to push this delightful memory from his mind in order to concentrate, when setting up for the job the next day. Another envelope with well prepared instructions had arrived through the mail-slot and this better be no trap or game this time, but a straightforward assignment. Something told him it
was.

He was still on guard and took some precautions. He was on the upper floor of a vacant office block that looked like money had run out halfway through reconstruction. Several staircases, no signs of security of any kind, nor squatters or in fact anybody having set foot in here in ages. Windows were partly intact, some boarded up. It was easy to find a good spot with a clear line of sight, yet back in the shadows and also screened from anyone who happened to come up either of the stairs. A good bit of rubble on the upper steps made sure he would also hear them.

He set up his rifle. It wasn't the same make as the one he'd lost – an L115A3 - but a semi-automatic Barrett M84, and while it was as familiar and as up to the task as the other, it was different, and he felt a renewed lick of anger at the reason he had to use it at all.

Better not to lose this one too or he'd have to go shopping in a rush.

~

Jim glared at the video. He didn't quite know how to react to this... Of course Moran wouldn't want his privacy encroached upon, but - pointing it up to the ceiling was worse than destroying it. And talking to the camera like that??

Oh, you think you can play a game with Jim Moriarty, darling? You are a cocky thing...

Jim watched with irritated fascination, even though staring at the ceiling was probably more frustrating than just listening...

He could hear muffled sounds of - getting undressed? No - that was the door. He must have changed and left. Where did he go?? He'd pulled men off of tailing Moran once he passed the test - bad move, Jimmy, he thought in annoyance.

The video cameras stopped recording when Moran left the apartment, and then picked up again when he returned home and... was he talking to someone? A man?

He brought a man home?

There was no reason for this to fill him with fury. But he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt this was for Jim's benefit. Sebastian had never brought anyone home before. All of his encounters while under surveillance had been either in public or somebody else's apartment.

Now suddenly he's bringing home a man and... putting on quite an aural performance.

Oh, well played, Moran...

Jim returned to staring at the video footage to the spectacular soundscape of grunting, groaning, and bodies slamming against each other.

The ceiling needs repainting, he thought idly. And you, my dear, need a valuable lesson about who you're dealing with...
Jim was waiting to receive a text that Moran's mark had been neutralized. As much as it would be fun to drop in on him as he was finishing up, it seemed unlikely Jim would survive such an encounter - considering the last person who 'dropped by' while Moran was working was thrown from a roof. And deservedly so.

Still, he preferred to avoid such confrontations if he wasn't sure he'd be the one to survive. Moran was obviously very good at what he did, and Jim didn't fancy pitting his own skills against him - not today, anyway. It didn't feel like a killing day... it felt like a 'toy with the new employee who’s a cocky fucker' kind of day.

Having now received the text that the hit was complete, he was on the move. By the time Moran was coming out of the stairwell, Jim was waiting at the back of the building a stone’s throw from an empty car park - facing away from the building, so he wouldn't immediately be deemed a threat.

He turned his head slightly, gestured at Moran to follow, and walked across the car park.

He didn't question that Moran would follow.

When Jim heard quiet footsteps behind him, he smiled to himself. He ducked behind the parking attendant booth that had never been occupied, and waited, looking at his mobile.

When Moran appeared, Jim was tersely speaking on his mobile. "I don't care if Petrofsky sent men after you... I'm not in the habit of hiring children who come crying to Daddy to do their job for them!" Jim gave Moran a cheerful smile and held up his index finger, apologetically.

"Well, deal with it by any means necessary, or I'll send Petrofsky your address myself! Now - when can I expect the next call from you with insignificant details about a job?" He listened for a moment, and looked surprised. "Never? Why, that sounds perfect! You, too… Try to get out and enjoy the sunshine, will you? All right, 'by then!"

Jim pocketed his mobile. "I'm so sorry about that. You can't imagine how difficult it is to find employees who can take care of any surprises that come up. But you're not one of those employees... are you, Moran.” He looked up at him, grinning wildly.

~

The lone figure outside the back of the building stopped him in his tracks. There was less an air of waiting about Moriarty than of idly surveying the scenery. Not even looking at the man who more or less had threatened to kill him. Condescendingly, but with an air of reconciliation as well, he gave the slightest gesture for Sebastian to follow. And, with a mixture of intrigue and annoyance (not least with himself) he found himself doing just that.

Moriarty waited for him behind the next corner, and Sebastian was held on standby – politely so – while the man continued a phone call which did not bode too well for the other party.
Half consciously, Sebastian crossed his arms as a sign he wasn't about to follow through with his threat. Also, he did not mind a bit to be left waiting for the benefit of this little insight.

“Next 'employer of the year award' coming up, huh?” he mused after the call had ended. "And no, can't imagine a single reason why you'd have difficulties finding staff. Apart from killing them off at the interview already...“

~

Jim listened to the stream of snarkiness pouring from Moran's mouth and smiled faintly.

*Well, then...*

He cocked his head and regarded the sniper standing tall and strong before him - clearly lethal and brimming with murderous impulses...

Well, he wasn't *the only one...*

"Are you under the impression, Moran, that you should be given preferential treatment?" Jim asked him curiously. "To not be screened in advance for potential problems; to not be tested for potential circumstances that may occur in the field; to not speak to your employer, a very dangerous man (as the rest of the world seems to know), with a modicum of respect?

Tell me, when you were in the military and you were doing your very manly training, did the chip on your shoulder slow you down? Or ever cause you to fall? Because I would hate to see such a thing happen while you're in my employ... you already escaped one magnificent tumble yesterday...

Well, Moran? I asked you a ques-tion..." he sang, eyes flashing.

~

Sebastian recognized danger when he saw it. Subtly and quietly it had been there from the very beginning - behind the singsong, the exaggerated smile, behind the deceptive joviality... But now was the first time (not counting the surreal Rant to a Dead Man on his voicemail) that it was flashing before him – palpably, like a viper coiling and raising its head.

Intoxicating as danger was, Sebastian knew when to stop provoking it. It was just so hard to back down when he found something outrageous or unreasonable - even though this attitude had cost him dearly before. And this despite the fact that James Moriarty wasn't one to conclude things with a measly *dishonourable discharge.*

“Well, which one do you want answered - there were several...“

Before Jim could really blow his lid, he started with, “No, I do not want preferential treatment, I just like better reasons for people trying to kill me than a fucking test.”
Or a whim.

“Or a fucking game."

That's what it had been, hadn't it? Because, believe it or not, there were ways to screen potential employees without snuffing them out.

The thing about a more respectful tone, though – there might be a good point there... somewhere. He could try and dial down the snark - no guarantees, though. Good intentions were slipping already, because he nearly hissed his next answer.

“And no, it didn't slow me down, it made me better than the rest!“

~

Jim raised his eyebrows, considering this.

"All right... you're not a mindless killing machine! You have a brain, you have feelings," he conceded, but with slightly mocking indignation. "You're fucking good at what you do and you don’t like to be toyed with!" he finished passionately, then his face went blank.

"The organization is fortunate to have such a skilled employee. Noted. I trust the details of the contract were received? Is there anything that requires clarification, Moran?" he said, sounding bored.

You don't like fucking games, darling? Fine - let's cool things way the fuck down... but I wonder if you'll secretly miss Daddy’s attention...

Jim looked at his phone and a smile played on his lips.

~

Strangely, Moriarty sounding reasonable was as unsettling as him going off the rails. His words, voice, face – quick, expressive, changeable – were simultaneously irritating and fascinating - leaving you constantly guessing at what was an act, or a game... or actually genuine. And wondering if he fucking knew it himself?

Sebastian just went with his gut - at the moment, yes, it seemed the viper was uncoiling ever so slightly. Asking about the contract, which Sebastian indeed had read.

“Well, I found the phrase regarding termination of employment a bit vague, but –“

Thinking of the phone-call he'd just witnessed, he shrugged his shoulders, with the slightest twitch in the corner of his mouth.
“- I'm presuming it would be quite in keeping with the beginning of my employment.”

Which should have him running a mile, and not just adding: “One other thing: I need a new rifle.”
(Really, Moran? Barely through the door, and haggling over the expense account already…?)

~

Jim regarded him sharply.

"Someone like you would do well enough here... play your cards right and there would be room to grow into a position which I think you should find fulfilling. As for termination of employment..." he raised an eyebrow. "Strictly case-by-case. I don't think I need to explain why this type of organization would operate this way. I suppose if you were unhappy with the work, it would be safest to just... disappear. Be like a ghost... a very quiet ghost. Because if you didn't... well, I should be very disappointed, darling!" He flashed a grin at Moran, and started typing out a text.

"And as for the rifle, but of course. Information will be sent to you regarding purchasing. You have access to the best weapons and supplies you could possibly need. Order whatever you need for a job to be done well."

Jim looked up from his phone. "Anything else you'd like clarified? Or to get off your chest? It's not good for a working relationship to harbour old resentments... I don't want to leave thinking everything's rosy, and then find out later at the company picnic you're still feeling unseen and unappreciated!" His face moved closer to Moran's, his expression neutral.

"I see you, Moran. And soon enough we’ll try you out working with me directly - why do you think I needed to make sure you could handle anything? So, if the air needs clearing or you still have questions... do it now," he said pleasantly, pocketing his phone.

~

Unexpectedly Moriarty was straight to the point, reasonable, and businesslike - and it drove home what hadn't fully registered during the adrenaline-charged rollercoaster ride of the last two days: this wasn't a game. This was real.

Sebastian feeling surprised and appreciative of what appeared to be honesty, began to mentally go over everything that had been said.

When first considering the offer and reviewing his decision to never work under anybody again, he had realized that in fact he missed being part of ... something. True, he was fed up to the back teeth with incompetent people in charge, but here was an organisation whose power he was only just beginning to grasp - and the very man who'd created it...

Work would be challenging, and no doubt dangerous, but the type of danger he relished - not the tedious risks that came with peddling your skills to a succession of unknown clients.
“Well, seeing my complaints being acknowledged – I'm good,” he finally said. “Clean slate.”

When Moriarty had come very close to him, and indicated he'd continue watching him, Sebastian had not drawn back. It didn't mean he'd been lulled into carelessness.

He rated the man in front of him as stable as nitroglycerin and as trustworthy as a Hong Kong taxi meter.

~

"Tabula rasa for everyone," Jim said, raising an eyebrow. "I can't tell you how happy this makes me. Well, then! If that's everything..." He flashed a sly smile as he started walking across the empty car park. A black Mercedes with tinted windows rolled down the street. It slowed as it approached, and a door opened. Jim paused. "I'm so looking forward to see your work up close and personal. Do make it count, darling..." His smile disappeared from his face, and he slid into the car.

One of his men, Steve, looked him over from the back seat. "I'll call off the snipers, Sir?"

"I called off the snipers before I arrived," Jim said, staring forward with glinting eyes. "I can handle Sebastian Moran... Now. Was the rifle delivered?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And, how was it left?" Jim prompted.


"Note reading, I wish to have no connection with any ship that does not sail fast; for I intend to go in harm's way. (John Paul Jones),"

"Excellent," Jim said, already distracted by his phone. "Next stop - the Diogenes club."

"Right away, Sir."

Jim typed out a text and replaced his phone in his pocket. He then stared listlessly out the window for the remainder of the trip.
Sebastian’s eyes followed Moriarty as he got into a black Mercedes that had appeared as if on cue.

Yes, that was everything. All settled, just like that. The signature on the contract was a rather insignificant formality...

Only after the car had gone did he shake himself out of his daze. Hoisting up his gun bag, he headed home.

Where, an hour later while going into his bedroom to change, he stopped short on the threshold. Staring. Impulses ranged from looking down for a tripwire to backing out slowly, but at the same time he could think of only one person prone to breaking into his flat and leaving things, instead of taking them. The way he nearly tiptoed to the bed had an air of a cat stalking a cream jug. The shape and size of the long black box (adorned with a bloodred satin bow, no less) were intriguing, as well as its weight when he cautiously lifted it up.

When he opened it, he felt dazed. Even disassembled, with the parts separately in their snug compartments, he knew at once...

The rifle was the exact same make and model as the one he’d lost yesterday.

How the heck could Moriarty know … well… purely rhetorical question. It was also impossible to rustle something like this up within a day – unless, apparently, you were said Moriarty...

“Oh, you impossible... creepy... beautiful little bastard,” he breathed, while he lifted out one of the parts almost reverently - the Zeiss scope, which Sebastian preferred to the Smith&Bender optics commonly used with an L115A3.

Only then did he see the card. He picked it up and read it, slowly grinning.

This wasn't just a replacement of something he had lost while being tested for the job. In a slightly wacky and decidedly poetic way it was also an explanation, and thus an apology - or as close to one as he’d ever get. And the little twist of a compliment was there, too: one man to another, who, like himself, wouldn't settle for anything less than the best of high-end weapons.

Well, if there had been even just the tiniest little grudge still left in Sebastian, after the set-up, the stalking, after everything, now it dissipated completely. God, James Moriarty knew the way to a sniper's heart...

Sebastian assembled the rifle and put it away, but not before he'd typed and sent a text.

'I haven’t even begun to fight.'
On the car ride to the Diogenes club Jim thought back to the interaction with Moran. For the first time, he began to doubt himself where the sniper was concerned. Yes, he'd tested potential employees before, but never with such... intensity. And yes, it was standard procedure to employ surveillance techniques, but he'd never taken such a personal interest before... what was driving him to take such measures with a complete stranger?

Right now he was on his way to a meeting with Mycroft Holmes, one of the most powerful men in the British government, and he felt... bored. Everything was back to being boring. The only thing that piqued Jim's interest these days was staying one step ahead of Mycroft's baby brother, that clever little sociopath…

Only now there was one more thing that had Jim’s interest-- a certain intriguing sniper with an attitude. In a couple of weeks, he'd be on a job with Moran and he’d get to see him in a professional capacity. That made the whole Sherlock game pale in comparison.

Jim had selected a potentially dangerous job, meeting with a notorious Russian mobster regarding a dispute over territory. Jim had proposed a business deal to sweeten the way to a truce. The mobster had agreed to discuss it, but it was just as likely they'd be walking into an ambush. Rather than cancel the meeting, Jim decided to go the way of controlled detonation - the devil who run at you head-on under circumstances of your own making is better than the devil who puts a knife into you at a cocktail party. Ooh, Jim thought, eyes lighting up. Knife at a cocktail party. Let’s try that - sometime soon? He mentally added it to his mind map under Violent Delights.

"Almost there, Sir," Steve said.

"I'm counting the moments," Jim replied, back to being bored out of his mind.

Just then he heard a text alert, and glanced at his phone.

Moran, he thought, a shock of pleasure moving through him.

He read the message and a smile slowly spread across his face.

~

Sebastian had spent the next day at a shooting range in the back of beyond, zeroing his new rifle, making all the necessary adjustments for his weapon to fit him perfectly, and generally being tremendously pleased with his new toy. With four hits being assigned to him over the next two weeks, he also had ample opportunity to put it to the test. In between those jobs there were others, that felt more like killing time or running errands, but never like he was just being fucked with or deliberately put into harm’s way just for the hell of it.

After the initial two weeks, a different kind of assignment appeared in his draft box. He didn't receive any particular details, but it was made clear that it would be personal protection i.e. bodyguard work. Or babysitting, as it was also a bit irreverently called. (He sure as hell would rather bite his tongue off than let that slip out... the baby in question might throw a dangerous tantrum.)
Despite the test he'd been subjected to at the start, despite the signed contract and the past two weeks of solitary jobs, despite having met Moriarty twice - it still felt a bit like the first day of a new job. It was all very 'meet the new colleagues.' Well, he wasn't the new tea lady or the fresh intern... but maybe this was a test as well. Moriarty had insinuated as much, so maybe this was about him watching his newest toy at work? See how well he could fit in, when not flying solo... Nothing too unusual about this... But still there was a tingle of anticipation, that seemed out of proportion to what would probably turn out to be another mundane task in the end.

It wasn't.

Arriving at the appointed time and place, an old disused warehouse in the middle of an industrial area, Sebastian met several of Moriarty's men and they were all filled in on a few more details. A mobster meeting, basically, although no-one used the term as such. And this was the kind of thing that could go all sorts of wrong…

~

The car pulled up to the warehouse. Steve got out of the car and disappeared into the warehouse to survey the scene, then returned a moment later. He and another bodyguard joined Jim as he exited the car and walked in where a small group of men was waiting for instructions. Jim was well aware of the imposing image he projected of a compact but malevolent force of nature in human form. (Black holes were compact too, he thought with grim pleasure.) Flanked by two brutes, he was wearing the finest tailored coat and suit any of them would have seen... His eyes hidden by designer sunglasses until just the right moment...

He coolly assessed the men, scanning everyone quickly until they settled on Moran. His expression didn't change, but he took a moment to savour looking at him.

"Steve," he said, in his default disaffected voice.

The tall man nodded. "As you know, you'll all here as back-up should things go pear-shaped. We've already called to change the location, in case they had snipers in place. Now they want a hostage exchange. So one of you will need to volunteer, but this should hopefully be a polite 5 minute conversation between Mr Moriarty and Mr Grigoryev. The usual generous danger pay will be applied to the volunteer's wages. Any takers? Or do I need to choose someone?" Steve looked at the group impatiently. Jim stared at his phone, but listened closely.

~

Bloody hell, the man knew how to make an entrance.

Even with no visible weapons, and in Saville Row's finest, he exuded more menace than the two tall bodyguards beside him, put together – there was power and danger here that went way beyond
merely physical, and it spelled out: *untouchable*.

The sunglasses seemed to hide something no mere mortal would wish to see. Sebastian wondered if Jim would just take them off at the appropriate moment to turn all their enemies to stone – that would come in handy. As this amusing thought did as well, because it probably saved Sebastian from simply gawping.

He turned his attention to Steve and his short briefing, which made it plain that everybody involved knew what they were doing and probably not for the first time.

Into the silence that followed the prompt for a volunteer hostage, he heard himself say: “I'll go.” At exactly the same moment one of the men did the same.

~

Jim's head snapped up from his phone. Was that -? Jesus, Moran... Are you trying to prove yourself, or are you suicidal?

His mouth tightened. He wasn't willing to take any more extra risks with him, not just yet.

The dispassionate part of Jim, the *Moriarty* side, was snidely reminding him that *he's* the one who gave Moran the bodyguard job in the first place, and it was kind of tricky to be a bodyguard without being at risk. Perhaps he'd like to have Moran working at home as his valet, laying out his clothing, and serving tea and cakes?

The impulsive part of Jim that felt and desired and got excited, the *Jimmy* side, protested vehemently - he had just got this toy, and hadn't even had a chance to play with it yet! And NO, Moran wasn't allowed to get in harm's way before he had his fun!

Jim squashed his impulse to send Moran home to wait for him naked and kneeling by his bed, and merely jerked his chin towards the first man who volunteered.

Steve nodded. "Hastings," he said tersely. "You're our man. Leave the weapons behind, they're going to frisk you anyway. Everybody else, load up. And for fuck's sake, only take grenades if you know how to use them! We don't want a repeat of the job two weeks ago. We're on the move in five."

Jim busied himself with his phone again as Steve went over logistical details like formation, strategy in case of attack, etc.

He found his eyes occasionally straying towards Moran who was listening with rapt attention. He found it difficult to tell if the man was disapproving of the plan, or if that was just his battle scowl.

Mmm. Moran's scowl was a thing to behold. He realized he'd forgot to return his eyes to his phone and had been staring at the sniper openly, albeit behind the safety of his shades. *Fuck*. Get it together, Jim...
He turned sharply and headed back to the car, and his bodyguard followed silently. He could hear Steve quickly wrapping up, and instructing everyone to get into the two waiting cars that would take them to the warehouse.

Jim got into the car, and once inside breathed deeply. Without Moran there to distract him, he was able to touch the cool, black centre within and reorient himself to Moriarty.

Moran wasn’t the only one with a battle scowl... he felt his mask slip into place and he nodded at Steve. The car engine roared into life, and they were on the move.

~

It was barely noticeable but Steve had been about to say something when, with nothing more than a small gesture, Moriarty had assigned the role of hostage to Hastings. It wasn't lost on Sebastian, and it told him that Moriarty didn't usually bother himself with decisions like this. It seemed to Sebastian that Steve was certainly capable enough to run the pack and that's what he'd normally be doing. But nobody questioned anything, Sebastian least of all, and they all listened to the briefing. The plan was as much of a plan as you could have if you didn't know what was going to happen - what few important details there were, he committed to memory easily.

Then they moved over to the weapon stash and tooled up. Calm, businesslike – everybody seemed to know what they wanted. Good sign. Equally without fussing around, Sebastian chose a Sig and a Ruger. The first because he himself was very familiar with the make, the second because Hastings appeared to have quite some paws on him...

He presumed the Russians would be familiar with the new location they'd chosen, but as it had been assigned for the meeting on such short notice, that would be all the advantage they'd have if things went off the rails. It was an old gasworks site down at the docks, and probably the only place ever to witness such a congregation of black cars, black shades and black attire since the funeral of Michael Jackson.

Steve and what appeared to be his Russian counterpart walked out onto neutral ground between the two sides. After a short talk both motioned to their respective parties, clearly the sign for the hostages to come over.

Sebastian was standing – totally (not) by accident – near Hastings, and a bit in front of him. He just turned and otherwise hardly had to move to block his path.

Sebastian just said, “Hold these for me, will you?” and the man was so bewildered, he faltered and automatically raised his hands, taking the two guns that were shoved against his chest.

Parting from his group and walking slowly over to the two negotiators while a young lad from the opposite camp did the same, he half waited for some commotion or someone calling him back, but at the same time he knew no-one would. Nothing would happen. Because nothing could happen without them looking disorganised or weak, or – worst of all – the boss not being in full command of his hounds.

The only thing that happened was a brief, seething stare from Steve, when Sebastian arrived at his destination. He returned it dispassionately, while casually raising his empty hands halfway, assuming
an at-ease stance for the Russian Steve to frisk him. British Steve couldn't do anything but take charge of his hostage, while Sebastian was walked into enemy territory at gunpoint.

~

Jim was waiting impatiently for the hostage exchange to happen, when suddenly he heard Moran’s voice.

His head snapped up and he watched in utter shock as the sniper shoved his guns at Hastings and took his place. If Jim hadn’t been practicing extreme control of his emotions in preparation for the meeting, he would have shown a rather more extreme reaction. His mouth tightened and he glared as he watched Moran get escorted by Russian mobsters and disappear.

What the fuck, Moran!! he railed in his mind. He had better come out of this alive, or... FUCK!!!!

Jim gave a practiced look of frustrated boredom to Steve when his head security returned with their hostage.

“Let’s get this done,” Jim said through a clenched jaw.

Steve passed the hostage along to a bodyguard for safekeeping. Then he stood next to Jim.

“Ready, Sir.”

“Showtiiime...” Jim sang quietly. Eyes gleaming, he stalked towards the open warehouse doors.

~

Even with the two posses of men half a warehouse apart and with no open hostilities – yet – you could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. For both sides having a hostage meant some insurance in more than just one way. Not least of all, keeping them in their midst would give the opposing party reason to think twice, before doing anything rash (as in: getting your Kalashnikovs out and letting them rip), because you would kill one of your own in the process. So instead of taking him away or outside, the Russians kept Sebastian right amongst them and fairly up front, too. Yes, they were hyper-alert, same as Steve and his men. Whenever Sebastian moved, such as inching away to the side a bit, his minder poked a gun between his ribs - not roughly but just as a reminder, and Sebastian placidly complied. He tried to see what was happening at the heart of the proceedings – where ‘Mr Moriarty and Mr Grigoryev’, only accompanied by their heads of security, had their ‘polite 5-minute talk’. At the moment it seemed just that – a pleasant talk.

Sebastian wasn't sure if he should wish for something to happen or not. Because all going well would mean there had been no real reason for him to do what he'd just done. And then there would
be hell to pay… (Maybe another five minutes into pleasant talks would be a good point to start considering defecting to the Russians?)

He understood very clearly that he'd done the unthinkable by disobeying a direct order from the boss, even if it had just been a short jerk of the head.

And he had only seen it out of the corner of his eye, but it had been there: that snap that went through Moriarty, the brief and inscrutable stare of the dark glasses in his direction, when he'd switched places with Hastings. Nothing more that betrayed anything, but Sebastian had a good idea what Moriarty might think of what he had done...

But no, he wasn't suicidal. And he wasn't showing off, because he was long past the point of having to prove anything to any – … okay, well, he was kidding himself...

Ultimately he had elected to take a position where he would be most useful in case things blew up. It was as simple as that.

~

Feeling the presence of the two men beside him like menacing bookends, Jim swept into the warehouse. He scanned everything within sight, noting all potential threats including the hulking Russian waiting for him in front of his men. Of course he spotted Moran instantly, and he looked fine - and that moment was all the attention Jim could spare on the impulsive, infuriating man, if they were all going to make it out of here alive.

Jim smiled brightly at the Russian crime boss. "Mr Grigoryev! Wonderful to see you again. How's the knee?"

The Russian scowled. "Mr Moriarty. The knee is fine. You want to bring attention to my injury, make me seem weak? Don't worry about knee. You worry about me."

"Oh, do I need to worry?" Jim asked in a lazy tone. "And I thought we were here to have a pleasant conversation..."

"Hmph. A pleasant conversation with you I think is dangerous game. Like - cupcake in a beartrap," Mr Grigoryev grunted.

"Cupcake in a beartrap!" Jim cackled. "I love it! Do you mind if I use it?"

He grunted again. "Makes no difference to me."
Jim's smile disappeared, replaced by a pout. "Mr Grigoryev, you wound me... the lack of trust makes me feel - so - sad. How ever will we come to a business agreement when one party is so deeply suspicious of the other?"

Mr Grigoryev heaved an impatient sigh. "*Enough*... You want to talk business or play little games?"

Jim raised an eyebrow. "Mishka, this was your idea to begin with. So I'll leave that up to you... What would *you* prefer, my dear? Business?" He smiled sharply. "Or a little game?"

~

Sebastian couldn't make out what was said between Moriarty and Mishka the Bear, but the overall tone of the conversation appeared to be getting a bit too snide for just banter...

And much more acutely Sebastian was becoming aware of something else. It wasn't anything you could see, or hear – just the odd man around him shifting slightly, some quiet words – and all this might have meant nothing at all, but...

He remembered the Russian hostage, walking over to the exchange. It hadn't been obvious, because the young man had kept it together quite decently - but when passing him, Sebastian had briefly gotten a glimpse into his eyes, unguarded for the fraction of a second.

The lad had been terrified.

Totally justifiable and natural reaction, being taken into the enemy camp all by yourself, with no idea of what was going to happen.

Or – knowing *exactly* what was going to happen.

Sebastian *sensed* it. He'd been in situations like this more than enough.

Around him, men were readying for battle - mentally, more than visibly doing anything. But he could feel it, smell it ... *taste* it, like the tang of ozone just before a thunderstorm. And he, his whole body, wasn't just picking it up, but was attuning to it. Like aligning to a familiar wavelength. Heart rate speeding up, breaking down time into fragments your subconscious mind and sharpened senses somehow stretched to the same length, slowing everything down around you. He looked over to Steve and his men, as if he could will them to share his perception. They were all no strangers to battle, he could tell. But none of them was here where he stood, so close to it...

But if he tried anything in the way of a sign or a message, it would probably set the Russians off at once, making the surprise even more disastrous...

No, Sebastian couldn't give any visible indication that he was aware of what was going on here.

He had attempted to strike up a conversation with his guard a few times and it had never gotten him more than a scowl from the man. But it had also served to get Sergey (as Sebastian had taken to calling him) a tiny bit annoyed, and also used to it. So he didn't spook when Sebastian talked to him
again, seemingly oblivious of the vibes.

“Jesus, Sergey - can't you tell your wife to go a bit less heavy on the garlic next time?” Sebastian turned slightly in the direction of the man, wrinkling his nose. “Seriously, I don't know how she can stand your...“

“You shut up.”

“Oh, you can talk...”

The gun left its familiar prodding point over his left kidney and the muzzle got shoved against the side of his head instead, Sergey stepping forward a bit. Yes, he was itchy and more than slightly annoyed now; he was downright nervous.

People assumed - and Russian mobsters were only human, after all – they couldn't have you more helpless and at their mercy than holding a gun to your head. When in truth you were much less fucked than with the gun being pointed at you from a few feet away (not as cinematic, but there you go). It didn't even take a lot of force to move a gun held by an outstretched hand a few inches to the side, and that was all it took to be out of the line of fire completely. You just had to be hellishly fast about it. Sebastian was, and with everyone's attention directed to the Moriarty bunch it took everybody one (in his perception) very long second to grasp what had just happened. That a gun had changed hands.

Sergey was the first to drop but not the last. Sebastian moved and fired in rapid succession, and, in the middle of his enemies he wasn't short of targets, nor did he need to aim all that carefully. He made the most out of his moment of surprise – the shots coming from a totally unexpected direction for everyone, and with rather unexpected result. Another second later pandemonium ensued, while Sebastian, emptying the nine-round-magazine, made it to a stack of wooden pallets and dove behind it, getting himself out of the way as best he could.

~

The Russian was giving Jim a death-stare, and Jim was enjoying grinning at him like an escaped mental patient. Between the two of them, it was Grigoryev who was rattled, although he was far too Russian to be overt about it. Jim noted with pleasure the clenching of his jaw, the slight reddening of the tips of his ears... well, that's probably the best he could get out of the ornery old bear, short of cutting up his own face to unnerve him.

But maybe just a little bit more… Jim allowed his madness to surface to his eyes. He'd been able to do this since childhood, sending the average person careening backwards with a simple look. Criminal types were harder to spook of course, especially psychopathic sadists from crime syndicates as old as the hills. But Mishka's eyes widened, and Jim saw a tiny flash of fear before it was deflected by the Russian angrily clearing his throat and blustering that he didn't have all day.

Only Jim wasn't paying attention to this. A wave of something went through him like an alarm -
violence and betrayal were coiling up tightly and were about to spring. Jim was just about to give the signal to Steve when - there was a sudden flurry of activity, a blur of action where Moran was being held. One moment, Jim was observing the sniper shooting everyone in sight, and the next moment he had his Beretta trained on Grigoryev who had been about to dive for cover.

"Dear Mishka, Time to Die! Looove, Cupcake," Jim shouted at him. Grinning, he shot the man between the eyes, before being thrown behind a shelving unit by Steve.

His head of security peered out behind the unit, while Jim listened happily to the sound of gunfire, shouting and bodies hitting the floor.

"Steve, be a dear and tell me if you can see where Moran is at..." Jim said in a lazy voice. "I really should be observing his work for his performance review."

~

Sebastian didn't give himself more than a few seconds to just breathe, listening to the shootout around him. The sound in an enclosed space was deafening – the echo, the whining ricochets, and men shouting just adding to the din. It was absolutely impossible to get a picture of the scene from his location. And what was more – the pile of pallets being the best cover this side of the warehouse, any second he might get company. Being out of ammunition, this was not something he was keen on.

He looked up, jumped, and scrabbled a bit before finally drawing himself up onto the stack of pallets. At about twelve feet in height, it was a good vantage point. Lying flat, he was out of sight of anyone who was close – the Russians - but could observe a good area of the warehouse.

Moriarty was nowhere to be seen – unlike Mishka the bear, sporting a neat bullethole in his forehead. The rest of his men didn't fare much better. With about half of them having been taken out by Sebastian, Steve's men took care of the rest. The shooting died down, and then there seemed to be just one Russian gun left still engaged in the fight, and stubbornly so.

Sebastian peered over the edge of his lookout: the shooter was using the cover of the same spot he himself had just been in, and was making a nuisance of himself. He was completely unaware of Sebastian, who, looking literally at the top of his head from above, briefly considered the height. Not a very comfortable drop, but then he went into a low crouch, and jumped anyway. He slammed into the man, whose body broke his fall pretty well, and killed him within a matter of seconds.

Then there was silence. And just the stifling, thick smell of blood and cordite.

Sebastian, disentangling himself from the dead Russian, slowly got to his feet and surveyed the scene of carnage.
Jim was watching from in between shelves as various men were trying to take out the surviving Russian with great cover. Steve was continually pushing him down, which would have annoyed Jim a lot more but he was rather fixated on looking for Moran. There was no sign of him, had he been shot?? Was he dead??

Steve was crouched down behind the shelves but every time he started to peek out, a bullet would slice through the air like a vicious mosquito. When Jim looked out from in between the shelves again, Steve was whispering furiously, 'Get down, Sir!' But if he had, Jim would have missed the next moment - the spectacular sight of Moran dropping down like some kind of an avenging fallen angel from - where the fuck had he come from?? Jim's mouth had fallen open and stayed that way as he stared at the sniper picking himself up off a dead Russian and brushing himself off. Jim looked over at Steve, who was also staring in disbelief.

"Ah... good find, Sir," he finally said.

"Isn't he?" Jim breathed, and then shook himself out of the reverie he had drifted towards. Had he sounded... dreamy??

Steve didn't seem to notice - he slowly left his cover with his gun pointed and his eyes scanning for trouble. There was none for Steve to find because all the Russians were dead and Trouble was strolling out from behind the shelves. He surveyed the scene, and wandered about jauntily with hands in his pockets.

As he passed by Moran, he lowered his sunglasses. Jim walked around him in a circle, eyeing him and finally murmuring, "Someone deserves a nice biscuit..."

He pushed his sunglasses back up and stared at the sniper hard. "Or to be taken out to the woodshed," he muttered before returning back to Steve.

He whispered to Steve briefly. Then with his other bodyguard beside him, Jim swaggered out of the warehouse singing the national anthem of Russia.

Steve started barking orders regarding removing the bodies of Jim's men who didn't make it, along with their weapons and artillery shells.

Men sprang into action, and Steve glanced back at Sebastian who was joining them.

"Moran! Come with me," he said tersely, and walked out the door.
Outwardly calm, but with adrenaline and aggression pounding and only slowly subsiding, Sebastian became aware of Moriarty - sauntering through the scene of the bloodbath, taking in his victory. Near Sebastian he looked at him over his sunglasses. Their gaze met briefly, before the man circled slowly around him, assessing - a bit unnervingly, he seemed to be deciding whether Sebastian should be receiving an apple in his stocking, or a lump of coal.

Sebastian resisted the impulse to crane his neck around to follow him with his eyes.

"Sir."

He only realised afterwards what he'd just said. How easily he'd slipped back, replying like any soldier being addressed, and assessed by his commander. And yet there was something... bland, even a bit bored in this reply. The formal deference of the term was undermined by something even Napoleon and Alexander the Great would have had to put up with. Men who'd just returned from battle, and triumphantly so, had an air about them... not just knowledge of their own worth, not just confidence, but quiet arrogance. A touch of insolence, even.

And when Steve called him to follow them to the car, Sebastian couldn't have cared less if it was off to the bakery now, or to the woodshed.

Jim waited in the car. He was feeling quite an assortment of things, and wasn't quite sure where to begin with Moran... but why on earth should that matter, he argued with himself. Say whatever you want, in whatever order you want. He's an employee, for fuck's sake... and you're you.

He was staring out the tinted window in the direction of home, but suddenly his eyes snapped back to the warehouse and there was Moran, appearing like something out of a goddamn film - god, he was practically walking in slow motion. The big, bad soldier who didn't play by the rules... The rebel, the misfit, the malcontent...

"Bad to the bone, are you, Moran?" Jim thought with amusement and ignored the thrill that moved through him.

"Well - if you're a renegade weapon, then you'll be MY renegade weapon... and mine alone, darling."

Jim returned to staring out the window as Steve got in opposite him, followed by Moran. Normally, this was when Jim would start with the head games - making a phone call and making the other person wait, saying cryptic things, speaking in silly voices and being downright unsettling. For the first time in a very long time, he realized he couldn't be bothered...

Jim turned and faced Moran, and removed his sunglasses.

"Well if you wanted my attention, that was pretty hard to ignore," he said pointedly. "Although it makes it harder to be angry when you got the job done. Not impossible, mind you... but distinctly harder to justify, without seeming like an unreasonable prick." Jim flashed a mad grin at him.

"So. You broke rank and could have cocked things up spectacularly... instead you saved the day... spectacularly. You have all the instincts, skills and essential nature needed to not just do the job well, but to rise in the ranks. But you're also a bit of a loose cannon. Aren't you, Moran... juuust liiike you were in the military. The question remains what to do with such a wild card... Interesting conundrum..." Jim looked at him curiously.
"Obviously I don't want to encourage disobedience. But I hardly want to hinder your killer instincts if they're going to pay off. So, wild card... you have my attention. That can be a good thing or a bad thing, to be honest. What do you want to do with it?" Jim's eyes swept over Moran's face. "What is it that you want, Moran? To be a sniper? To kill your mark, get paid handsomely... and then go drinking and shagging all over town? Or do you want more?" Jim twirled his sunglasses around his finger, not moving his gaze from Moran's eyes.

~

Sebastian had braced himself for a serious dressing-down and had taken care to assume a state of stoic indifference – in his experience this was the most promising approach to neither party being shot, strangled, demoted, or booted out. Also there wasn't even a hint of Moriarty being an 'unreasonable prick' again. Sebastian hid a grin at this, but mainly he was just... floored. It didn't sound like a trap or something leading to a joke at his expense either... Moriarty appeared to be genuinely asking what he wanted.

He also referred to Sebastian's military past, which had to come up at some point, he thought, although it was not his favourite topic... Especially not insinuations as to why it was past at all.

"Well, if you know all this" he said evenly, "then you also know it's usually the head shed limiting my potential, not myself." Meaning it wasn't just the matter of what he wanted to do but what the powers that be would let him do.

"And I don't find much wrong with 'sniping, drinking and shagging' to be honest", he added with the slightest grin, "although it does sound a bit... pedestrian, when you put it like that."

~

"Oh, it sounds pedestrian...?" Jim arched an eyebrow. "Well. It's entirely up to you, isn’t it. You can take your destiny by the horns and ride it into a place of legend, reaching greater heights than you've ever imagined, or..." Jim shrugged, eying Moran strangely. "By all means, darling! Stay in your comfort zone and snipe, drink and shag yourself senseless. I would have pegged you for someone with more ambitions, but I suppose it's possible I misread the signs."

He tilted his head and stared in puzzlement and irritation at the sniper. "How unusual... well, we'll just drop you at home, don't want to interfere with any riveting plans for the evening..."

Jim smirked, pulled out his phone and started checking messages.

~
Ahm... where was the sudden crankiness coming from? Regarding his professional ambitions, Sebastian thought he'd had quite a run… Hadn't he? Considering he'd only just been here for about three weeks… Just what exactly his plans for the evening had to do with that eluded him. Unless...

He raised one eyebrow.

"Well, if there's more riveting plans coming up - by all means... interfere all you want."

He was needled, not least by the fact that he had allowed himself to be.

~

"You should stick to your routine, it's the safest thing for you. As you were, Moran..." Jim sounded distracted, but there was an air of mocking present in his tone. Of course there was. For the first time in an age, Jim had spoken straight with an employee, said right out there was room to grow in the organization, and asked him to express his aspirations... and the man instead told him that he was comfortable with his little life of going from job to job, conquest to conquest... it was practically throwing Jim's gesture back in his face.

And then he had the gall to imply... what, that he'd be open to some random experience with his employer sometime? Oh no no NO, darling... that's not how this works. I'm the one who decides where you go and when. And IF. You don't get to make suggestions, especially after that behaviour. The cheek of the man! Well, Jim knew how to be cheeky, too.

He texted Steve, who's phone pinged with a muffled alert. His bodyguard checked the message, nodded and gave quiet instructions to the driver.

After a moment, the car slowed and Steve got out. Jim made a very pleasant call to his tailor as they waited. When Steve returned with a paper bag, he sat with it on his lap. He and Jim exchanged a few comments about how the job had gone, laughing snidely about details they hadn't had time to discuss. By the time they got to Sebastian's apartment, Jim was enjoying the flush of a successful outcome, and had almost forgotten to be rankled by his experience with Moran. Almost.

"The next job will be for a sniper, so I hope you'll enjoy it. Great work today, Moran!" Jim sounded polite and dismissive. He watched as Steve escorted him out of the car, spoke to him briefly, and handed him the paper bag.

Jim wrote out a text as Steve returned and slid into the car. He looked at the message:

*The woodshed is not somewhere employees should want to go. Or any sane person. It's not to be found anywhere near a comfort zone. Enjoy your biscuit.*

Chuckling, he hit send.

~

And then the obnoxious unreasonable prick was back… Sebastian wasn't even sure why, because as
he saw it, basically he'd stated – twice, even - that he was up for anything his new employer cared to throw at him. The next moment he seemed to have vanished into thin air, for all the attention he got for the remainder of the journey - Moriarty texting, calling his tailor and then going over the events of the last hour with Steve. As if Sebastian wasn't there at all, or no more than the kitchen help, patronizingly getting dropped off at home after the end of the shift.

Well, what answer would have spared the obnoxious fucker the disappointment he apparently experienced, again?

*Where do I see myself in six months in my new job... ? Of course, Sir! I am going to be 2IC and shagging the boss, too.*

Yeah, sure... But even Sebastian had enough sense of self-preservation to avoid adding another casualty to today’s final tally.

He stared out of the window without seeing much, apart from a slightly reddish haze. He could not get past the gall of his employer insinuating complacency in a man who had just walked into a posse of Russian mobsters, empty-handed and of his own accord… who had probably saved a *substantial* number of his men. (Of course, Jim probably just saw them as resources, whose unfortunate demise would affect him only because of the tedious bother of replacing them!)

Well, the red fog in front of Sebastian's eyes gave no indication of dissipating and neither did it register that they'd made a short stop, nor most of what Moriarty was saying when he spoke to him again.

Sebastian was tamping down on his fury enough to offer a civilized "Sir", before getting out of the car when it stopped near his apartment building.

When it pulled away, he stared perplexed at the paper bag he'd been handed, and was peering inside when at that same moment his phone pinged. He read the text while heading for home, dangling the bag over the nearest rubbish bin he passed, and then dropping it in - fancy tissue paper, biscuit, pink icing and all. Then he typed a text.

*Says the man who thinks he knows what a woodshed even looks like.*

~

Jim was going over some business with Steve when his text alert went off. Daddy Cool by Boney M blared through the car, and Jim glanced down at his screen in annoyance.

He looked at the words in disbelief - at first they didn't make any sense, because the message would imply an employee said something disparaging to him. Surely *not*... but... what other meaning could there possibly be? Disbelief faded away, and he stared in cold fury at the screen.

*Well... that was... WELL.*

He looked up at Steve who was watching him questioningly. Jim's eyes widened and he choked out a loud laugh.
"Sir? Is something wrong?" his head of security asked crisply.

Jim laughed again, and this time it was gleeful. "Is something wrong... is something **wrong**... Well! That depends on a lot of things, Steve... like whether you're the recipient of this message or the sender. Because, ohhhh... it looks like someone wants to **play**, Steve. Do you have any idea how rare that is?"

Steve's eyebrows raised slightly. "I should think... exceedingly, Sir..."

"Exactly so! Well, then... when a mouse leaves a note for the cat, it would be rude not to at least acknowledge receipt. Steve, you will pardon me for a moment while I compose an appropriate reply?" Jim gestured at his phone.

"Of course, Sir..."

Jim noted the amusement in Steve's eyes, and grinned at his phone.

Hmmm.... dear boy, you are in trouble...

Jim typed rapidly:

> It's never recommended to run one's mouth off about things one doesn't know. Imagine the trouble one could get into!

> As for knowing my way around the woodshed... well, darling. No one's complained about it yet, and for good reason. Enjoy your night, Moran.

> JM

~

Sebastian had just let himself into his flat when the text came in. He lit a cigarette before he read it. Well, he certainly had hit some mark here.... or overstepped one...

There was a tingly rush but also a slightly uneasy tingle across the back of his neck that spoke a clear warning. It told him to keep the hands off his phone for the time being and quietly vanish into the nearest hiding hole.

He did quite the opposite - he showered and changed and **went out**… typing a reply on his way.
In the light of that, I'll certainly make sure I do.

And then, as an afterthought, he sent a second message:

Sir.

~

Back at home, Jim was still pondering Moran's response while trying to get some work done and nursing a rum and coke.

It seemed to do the trick, Jim's text - implied what kind of employer Moran was dealing with, and hinted at terrible fates that could befall anyone who didn't give him the fear and respect he was used to.

Jim sat back in his office chair, steepled his fingers. Moran's response was simple and respectful. But there was the little bit about making sure Jim knew he was going to enjoy his night. He didn't have to include that... was that to get under his skin??

But that would mean Moran suspected something about Jim's motives...

But what was there to suspect??

Jim jumped up from his chair, knocking against his glass. Rum and coke splashed over the side and onto his fine oak desk. Jim cursed and dabbed at the spill with a tissue. He glared at the damp spot - fuck it. He'd order a new desk and have it by tomorrow.

More importantly, he couldn't just sit here all night, knowing Moran was up to god knows what with some slag or some fuck boy... Jim narrowed his eyes. Tonight would be a man. Jim had gotten under Moran's skin - he'd be looking to take his frustration out on a man, or strike back at Jim unconsciously with another man.

Jim pulled out his phone, and began tracking Moran's cell phone with the little hack job he'd managed when he first started his surveillance of the man.

Jim imagined showing up at the same club, seemingly by coincidence, and then - inviting him to have a drink - soon they'd be laughing about how heated things had gotten, and being semi-apologetic and intrigued, before Moran whispered something in his ear and Jim laughed, flustered. He'd then nod, smiling coyly, and Moran would sling an arm around his shoulder as they walked out the front door. They'd hail a cab, and for the duration of the ride to Jim's apartment, they'd be making out hot and heavy. Then Moran would pull back, hands on Jim's face, and whisper -

WHAT. THE. FUCK.

Jim blinked and fell out of the scenario his brain had concocted. Jesus Christ, what the fuck was that?? He glared at the rum and coke in front of him. This is why he didn't drink. Fanciful ridiculous flights of fantasy...

Obviously that little scenario would never happen. But he could bloody well see to it that whatever Moran had planned for tonight didn't happen either. Not on his fucking watch.
Feeling lighter, Jim went to his closet, and surveyed the contents.

Something nondescript. Black skinny jeans and t-shirt. Black hoodie and sunglasses. Moran would never expect someone like Jim to look like some coked out club kid. But he knew from experience he could pull it off ridiculously well. It's amazing how hot that look was to men in gay clubs. He looked barely legal, which was like catnip to the tomcats in the crowd.

He didn't think it would be Moran's particular cup of tea, so he didn't have to worry about being approached by him. He just needed a disguise that would allow him to move through the currents of the club like a shark on the scent of blood in the water...
He tried to remember if ever before in his life a span of two weeks had felt like this - packed with so much fury and exasperation, intrigue, elation, insanity and close shaves - charged with something that screamed at him to run a mile - and at the same time drew him like a moth into a candle flame...

And at the epicenter of all that… just one man. God, he couldn't remember anyone who had managed to get under his skin like this, not within two fucking weeks...not ever. It was infuriating, and exhilarating too. How could anyone make everything else dwindle into insignificance – in a good and very bad way at the same time - just by turning his attention to you?

Even if Sebastian had been capable of any rational thought or analysis, rather than just a sheer visceral sensation, even then he could not have begun to describe what this did to him – tingling down his spine, raising his hackles, making him want to purr, or… bite.

“Well – do you want to come in or not?” Only when one of the two bouncers at the doors of the club impatiently addressed him, he realised he'd completely zoned out while slowly moving towards the door with the queue.

Of course he did. He had every intention to do as advised: enjoy his night out. The Shadowlounge was one of the most promising places for that. Ten minutes later he downed his first vodka at the bar, the level of noise and music making any verbal communication nearly impossible, which was exactly the point, wasn't it? A funny little twink bought him another drink, but got ditched nonetheless, as after that Sebastian dove into the heaving, sweaty throng on the dancefloor. His outfit – black T-Shirt and jeans - didn't try to compete with the usual eccentricities here, but the man who wore it drew interest enough. A joint ended up in his hand, which he passed on after two drags. His body and even his pulse seemed to align with the techno beats, just like the colourful lights bathing his face when he dropped his head back, exhaling.

Jim slipped silently through the crowd, coasting through the clouds of pheromones, lust, violence, intoxication, and desperation rising through the club... it was a heady chemical cocktail, and Jim breathed it in as one might suck back opium through a pipe. His eyes glazed over momentarily as the Hunt rose up in him, and coursed through his veins like a lush black shadow.

His head moved back and forth to the music. At least, anyone unobservant would think he was moving to the music. Someone with keener senses might see that it was something else entirely that fuelled his movements... and that they were more like a serpent’s than a clubgoer - moving hypnotically as he moved through the crowd.

Others still might find themselves suddenly under the sway of this young man hiding behind his hoodie and shades, and feel mesmerized enough to bring him drinks and drugs, and in exchange receive his attention for the span of a song - to dance rhythmically to the pounding beats, or to make out for a brief moment before he disappeared into the crowd.

Jim moved his tongue against the fake lip piercing on the left of his bottom lip. It gave the effect of
someone drugged out and feeling lascivious... and he was certain this would not spear Moran's attention...

He needed this anonymity as he circled the club, watching Moran make his own rounds... and when the sniper seemed to have settled his sights on someone (not a drugged out twink, unsurprisingly), Jim stationed himself by the bar so he could watch the proceedings while he drank what looked like gin and tonic, but was actually water with lime and plenty of ice. He narrowed his eyes as Moran whispered in the man's ear. The question remained... would the intended act be taking place in the club or outside? Jim's muscles tensed, and he breathed deeply, ready to make his move.

Moran jerked his head towards the back room of the club. The man he was dancing with smiled knowingly and took his hand, pulling him along through the crowd.

Jim had felt a smile dancing on his lips, but at the sight of the outstretched hand he felt rage spike through him like a living flame.

He felt red and yellow sparks of electricity raining down over him...

molten lava threading through his veins...

searing heat and pressure mounting in every cell, a fiery explosion about to engulf the entire club in his fury...

The music fuelled him forward, the thumping beat punctuating his movements as he loped towards the two men.

As they neared the door of the room, Jim was shoving his leg sharply into the back of an intoxicated club kid's knee so he fell forward against the man following Moran. At the exact moment of impact, Jim was jabbing a hypodermic needle into the man's left buttock.

The man fell forward as the club kid shrieked and fell drunkenly on top of him. Jim noted the turn of Moran's head, calculated his blind spot, and smashed a glass hard on the ground so it exploded into jagged shards around the bodies on the floor. Jim melted into the crowd, and from a safe distance leaned against the bar to observe. Moran was crouching on the ground, assisting the man into a sitting position, and looking quite perplexed.

Jim turned to a young blonde man who was also watching the proceedings. "I think it's just shameful when older gents can't hold their bloody drink," he said slowly in a working-class Brixton accent.

The young man laughed snidely at this, and went to clink his glass with Jim's. When he realized Jim didn't have a glass, he demanded that the bartender bring them whisky sours immediately. Once the glasses were in their hands, they were promptly clinked against each other. Jim drank his whisky sour, watching Moran over his sunglasses as he did. Moran had helped the man to stand, and was now diving to catch him as he fell face forward towards the floor.

"Another round!" the young man crowed, and a brilliant smile broke out onto Jim's face.

"I'll drink to that," he said, pushing his glass back across the bar and pulling the young man into a kiss. His eyes flicked over Moran making a call on his phone as he half-carried, half-dragged the limp man to a chair. Jim grinned and closed his eyes briefly as he allowed himself to imagine kissing a surly, powerful soldier.
They hadn't even exchanged names – something not worth the trouble to shout at each other over the booming noise of the music, as, in fact, talking wasn't necessary to size each other up and come to an agreement. The bloke was maybe a bit younger than Sebastian, but the rough-and-ready-type with that flash of challenge in his eyes (not that Sebastian was overly interested in his eyes), which promised that delicious almost-as-much-fight-as-fuck kind of encounter. Sebastian let himself be grabbed, allowing the other guy the sweet illusion of being in charge here, before taking the lead. Then everything happened so quickly, that he barely saw how. There was shrieking and shattering glass, and Sebastian was still turning around, when his companion and someone who'd stumbled into him already went down together.

Sebastian had to suppress the automatic physical reflex of going into combat mode, but could make out no other cause for the collision than an inebriated kid. He removed him, and not very gently either, from the pile-up. But it turned out the other guy looked a bit worse for wear, too – white as a sheet and barely responding, although Sebastian did get him up into a sitting position, and then to his feet. Which immediately gave out again. Bloody hell! He was quick enough to catch the man so he wouldn't bang his head again – because that's what must have happened, right? - and dragged him over to a chair, already getting out his phone, cursing again, this time about the shards of glass crunching beneath his feet.

But at least they kept the other revellers at bay, and gave him some room. No-one really seemed concerned about someone who'd apparently just passed out drunk.

Which Sebastian knew wasn't the case and he was checking the man's pulse while he got the emergency services on the line and rattled off details. Luckily the music wasn't as loud here, so hopefully they would get what he was saying. Then he continued looking after what had basically turned from a prospective lay into a flat-out casualty. The man came around slowly but his attempts to get on his feet were not very promising.

“No way - you're not going anywhere, you hear? Not till the medics get here, then you'll go with them.” As Sebastian watched, at least the alarming bluish tinge vanished from the man's lips, or maybe it had never been there, and was just a trick of the light.

Anyway - there was no reason to let such a little incident throw you off track, and half an hour, an ambulance call, and a stiff drink later, Sebastian was back in the game. His next catch had the body of a fucking stripper (and about as many clothes on him), but seemed quite adaptable when Sebastian suggested they ‘take this outside’...

A little fresh air was always pleasant, wasn’t it?

~

Jim stopped kissing the blond young man, who was gazing at him with blissful eyes. He then patted his cheek softly, and got up to melt away into the crowd.

Jim watched Moran waiting for the medics, as he danced immersed in flashing lights.
As he watched, a muscular man in a white tank top pressed a vial of amyl nitrate into Jim’s hand... he was going to pocket it, but something compelled him to open the lid. The man smiled and held the vial for him as he inhaled, then threw it towards the wall. There was a tinkle of glass, barely heard over the music and laughter.

Jim was still watching, as the muscular man moved big hands along his chest and down to his hips. These hips were moving in a circular grinding motion, as Moran walked away from the limp man in the care of paramedics. Jim's hands snared the man's big hands before they moved to his arse, and then shoved them back when he saw Moran leaning in to chat to a tall man at the bar. The man was wearing short black leather shorts, black boots, glitter and nothing else. He seemed very amenable to what Moran had proposed. The man followed Jim's sniper, dancing as he walked.

Jim smiled slightly to himself and moved quickly around the crowd, arriving at the back door first. He spotted a man with a shaved head and black tank top, and pulled him into a kiss against the wall by the door.

His eyes flicked up to the approaching sniper. As soon as Moran passed through the back door to the back alley, Jim's next move was to drag the Black Tank Top man into the doorway and secretly lock the door while he continued to kiss him.

Then he grinned, hauled back and punched the man in the jaw. The man shouted in surprise and anger, and threw a wild punch back. Jim easily dodged the punch - which meant it hit the back of somebody else’s head - and noted with satisfaction that Leather Shorts Man who had been following Moran was simply standing and watching open-mouthed at the fight breaking out.

Jim blew a kiss at Moran's would-be partner, then grabbed a bottle from someone's hand and smashed it against the bar. A bouncer came lunging at Jim, who allowed himself to be tackled to the floor. His arm seemingly flailed, and the broken bottle in his hand made hard contact with Leather Shorts Man's calf. He howled in pain and shock as blood came pouring out of the jagged wound in his leg. As he fell to the ground shouting, Jim noted with pleasure the sound of someone slamming against the back door, trying to get in. He knew he had only moments to leave the area and as suspected, the bouncer let go of him so he could attend to the bleeding, screaming patron on the floor.

Jim jumped up seamlessly, and once again melted into the crowd. He moved through the crush of bodies towards the middle of the club, before he turned back to look for Moran. Hmm. No sign of him...

Jim felt a warning flash through him to get out now, and he moved like quicksilver towards the front door.

There were so many people moving away from the blood and screaming in the back, as well as the brawling that had broken since the first punch; Jim was slammed forward into a powerful body, whose hands reached out to his shoulders to steady him. He fought tooth and nail against his instinct to look up, merely hunching his shoulders and bending his head down as he moved with the crowd towards the front door. He reached the front door and as he slipped through, he allowed himself to move his head slightly to look over his shoulder. Moran had been rushing to the bar, but was now turning his head to look at the front door. Jim plunged into the freedom of the night air with a breath of relief. He shoved his hands in his pockets and ran down the street, heart pounding in excitement, and laughing wildly.
There was a cluster of people by the back door so it was quite a squeeze to get out. Sebastian was just turning around to see if he still had his prey in tow, when the heavy door clanged shut in his face, with shouts and the sound of a fight breaking out behind it. He tried to open it, but it didn't budge, not even when he threw his weight against it.

“... the fuck?!“

He couldn't be sure but he thought he'd heard the lock turn, and no amount of banging and shouting did any good. There were some other patrons around, but none of them overly concerned, interested, or even aware of what was happening, being far too occupied with the things you usually did outside the back door of a club. Or simply stoned out of their minds. With an exasperated curse and a last kick against the door, Sebastian turned and found a way through the neighbouring building back into the street and to the club’s front door. The bouncers decided against a violent argument with him whether he'd been inside before. He found himself shoving through a mass of people, working his way against the current in an atmosphere that seemed just a hair’s breadth shy of a stampede. Someone slammed into him and Sebastian, by now nearly in the frame of mind to bloody deck him, steadied both of them by briefly grabbing the guy's hunched shoulders. He pushed around him with a growl. If the little twit would take off his fucking hood, maybe he’d see where he was going...! Who the fuck stuck to hoody and sunglasses in a barely-lit club anyway?! He remembered thinking that before, and turned around...

But then he was distracted by what was going on at the back of the club, where the fight seemed to have broken up into little skirmishes, each with a life of their own. And a fight being not too bad a substitute for a fuck to let off some steam, Sebastian was about to join the fray, but then thought better of it. It looked like someone had been stabbed, and bloody Christ... it was the guy he'd picked up just before they'd been separated. He seemed to be doing okay, but Sebastian changed course, steered well clear of the mess and headed for the bar.

Probably the paramedics would appear again soon - the second time within half an hour to attend to someone he'd nearly hooked up with. None of this was his fault, and he judged the chances of the police being called in as quite slim, but – you never knew.

He had no inclination to be questioned, even as a witness. He would make this drink his last one, and call it a night.

It was on the way home that the absurdity – the completely exasperating, ridiculous absurdity! - of the whole night really struck him. In hindsight it would turn into the kind of bizarre and hilarious story he used to share with his mates on a bender, when everybody was already half pissed out of their minds. Or he just wouldn’t care to think about it ever again.

He couldn't complain about being out of luck lately, quite the opposite - so maybe this was just Karma the Bitch levelling the field a bit. There was no other explanation than coincidence, and a fucking spectacular run of bad luck.

He stopped to light a cigarette, chuckling at his next thought - maybe he should not have bragged in the face of the devil about how much he would enjoy his night out...
When Jim entered his penthouse, he kicked the door closed and then leaned against it. Laughing, he pushed off and sauntered to the bathroom. It had been awhile since he felt this good, this directly involved in mayhem. Usually he set the pieces up on the board and watched them gleefully as they wobbled about and then pitched onto the floor. He wasn't the one in the middle of the fray these days, but on some level, he supposed he missed it.

*Well,* he thought, grinning. *It wouldn't do to get too carried away. Only there was no way in hell he was going to stand by knowing Moran was hooking up with every Tom, Dick and Harriet who was looking to score in London. Not going to happen, darling... no one gets to touch you but...*

Jim had been slowing down as he approached the bathroom. Realizing what he'd been thinking, he froze. He'd sounded distinctly like someone who was... "Fuck.." he muttered, and then repeated loudly, "FUCK!"

Someone who was... interested in touching him.

Jim forcefully pushed open the door of the bathroom, and stared hard at himself in the mirror. He removed his sunglasses and threw them on the counter. He pulled his hood down and stared at his reflection as he ran his fingers through his flattened hair.

*I thought we decided we weren't going to do this with an employee, Jimmy... his clever mind reminded him.*

"We're not doing shit with the employee, Jiminy Cricket..." Jim muttered. "We're just going to make sure he doesn't do anything with anyone else."

He leaned on the counter, looking closely at his swollen cheek in the mirror. What was that from?? Ah, yes - the bouncer's shoulder when he had tackled Jim to the floor. Was that going to leave a fucking bruise??

*That's not playing nice, Jimmy...* his voice tsked, but there was amusement bubbling up underneath.

Jim smiled at himself in the mirror, his eyes gleaming.

"No... it's really not..." he purred. He made a mental note to have the bouncer's face broken, as he pulled out his phone and scrolled through various playlists. Grinning, he selected his playlist for beginning a campaign.

He closed his eyes and slowly moved his head back and forth as the opening notes began from the Glitch Mob remix of the White Stripe's Seven Nation Army. His eyes flew open as the snarling lyrics began:

*I'm gonna fight 'em all
A seven nation army couldn't hold me back*

He yanked off his hoodie and threw it against the mirror. He watched mesmerized as his eyes took
on an unearthly gleam and he slowly began to move.

*And I'm talking to myself at night*

*Because I can't forget*

*Back and forth through my mind*

*Behind a cigarette*

*And the message coming from my eyes*

*Says leave it alone*

Jim worked the fake piercing off his lip and threw it against the mirror. By the time the metal was clinking against the mirror and then the counter, Jim had flung himself out of the room and was dancing down the hallway. His hand flicked the hall light on and off rapidly for a strobe light effect. He danced in a violent manner down the hallway until the song was reaching its grinding climax - then he threw himself onto the bannister, sliding down to the main floor while screaming an unearthly battle cry. When he reached the bottom, he slid off with an arched back and landed spectacularly, boots slamming into the ground and legs spread wide.

“That’s right, darling,” he purred, as he headed for the bedroom, pulling off his clothes and throwing them as he went. “You will *never* find anything hotter than *this*...”

The next morning, Jim awoke to a pounding headache from the drinking, a fuzzy toxic feeling from the drugs, and a foul mood for god knows what reason. He sat up and covered his face with his hands, groaning. His hand jerked back and he touched his cheek gingerly. He stormed to the bathroom to look at his face in the mirror. A goddamn bruise - fucking *perfect*. He yanked open a drawer to find some make-up to cover it, and threw the tube on the counter. Memories surfaced from last night, and the foul mood abated somewhat. He smirked and headed back to his phone on the bedside table.

Jim paced next to his bed as he wrote two texts to Steve. One was instructions about the bouncer - might as well throw in a broken arm, too. Fucker.

The second text was about Moran - to make the next few jobs long assignments ending very late at night. And then in five days, to put him on bodyguard detail again. By then, hopefully the bruise will have faded. Jim sent the texts, eyes glinting. A strong desire to send a snarky message to Moran was stifled, and Jim emphatically thumped the phone on the table before stomping to the washroom to apply make-up to his bruised cheekbone.

~

Sebastian awoke the next morning to a less painful but equally persistent reminder of what had – or rather, had *not* - happened last night. (And taking care of it was a lot more pleasant than applying concealer.)
That sorted, followed by a mug of coffee and a cigarette, he went for a run. On his return, he showered, and then, while having breakfast, he checked his messages. Ah, no more brown envelopes through the mail slot, he thought, when he found the log-in details for an email account. He was fairly familiar with the proceedings, and went straight to the drafts folder of the account and read the one document that was in there. He just added a short confirmation and logged out again. It was a method of communication with nothing being sent, so that nothing could be intercepted.

And hell – James Moriarty sure didn't dawdle about putting his newest acquisition to work. Five jobs over the next five days... The instructions were as clear as they had been for his first two assignments, the helpful details in terms of target schedule… a bit more vague.

The first was a fairly straightforward sniping job, even with a bit of a spicy twist, or a slightly frustrating one - for hours he didn't get to do anything but to watch the target in his hotel room, going at it with his mistress, before he finally got a clean shot. (Talk about going out with a bang…)

The second was to be, as it was clearly stated, more close-up work - and it took some doing, because there was no opportunity to get near the man until he came out of a gambling den in the small hours of the morning all by himself. He was killed by three bullets – double tap to the chest, to make sure, one to the head, for style.

Then there was this very nice couple, and that had to look like an accident. They died in their flashy BMW when it was run off a flyover by a lorry, the burnt-out wrecks even making it onto the evening news.

It was the fourth job that really took the biscuit. Explicitly stated to be just recon work, watching a high-flying judge, newly appointed to the CPS. Whatever for, he had no idea - because all Sebastian got to see after he'd watched his empty house for thirty-six bloody hours, was the man returning with a suitcase - airport labels still on it - and going straight to bed.

Speaking of which - by then Sebastian was really knackered, and more than ready to follow instructions for the last task to a tee – taking out a fledgling Ukrainian mobster, and being sure to make an example of it. And it ended up being a very vivid one. (He could handle sleep deprivation quite well, but after five days, it was starting to make him cranky.)

A bit bleary eyed the next morning, he read the new entry in his drafts folder. With a heartfelt curse, he realised he was on bodyguard duty for that very day...

~

Jim was tapping away at his laptop, but something was making it hard to focus. He sighed and rubbed his eyes. Today was the day... it felt like it had been the longest five days of Jim's life. He had to throw himself into work, and once he did he was able to get into the zone... but inevitably a thought would draw him out with an increased heart rate. He'd then have to check his messages to see if Moran had finished the job.

The messages were all business, and there was none of the former snarkiness of before. Moran was giving Jim all the respect in the world, as Jim had demanded... and he felt disappointed. There were no accusations of messing with his personal life, which was as Jim intended… but to what end? Was he going to have to keep Moran from ever having a hook-up again?? It was unsustainable... and unsatisfying... but what other choice did he have?
Was he supposed to stand by and let Moran prance all over London like some prize stallion, with his pick of all the best ponies with shiny manes and soft eyes? He burst out laughing at his absurd analogy, but his laugh was bordering on sadness and he didn't know why... maybe because he knew the best plan of action was to just make himself let it go...

Jim sighed, logged out of his e-mail, and closed his laptop. He squeezed his eyes shut, and steepled his fingers. A small smile appeared on his lips, and then slipped away. Well, at the very least he would see how Moran acted around him when he saw him. Maybe that would help him decide his future plan of action. The only thing he knew was that he could not, would not, make the same mistakes of the past. He headed to his walk-in closet and looked for the right outfit for their little reunion.

Hours later, Jim was waiting in the car, bored. This wasn't an exciting job like the last one... he just had to meet with a potential supplier of guns, and finalize their agreement. His second bodyguard had been injured on a job a few days ago. Jim couldn't help but wonder how Moran would have handled the situation differently. Steve had handled his part well as always, and Jim had not been in critical danger - but there was a lot on Steve's plate, being one of his few truly reliable and trusted employees. Jim needed to free up some of his responsibilities, but who could shoulder them as well as he did?

Jim toyed with the idea of Moran filling in for the second bodyguard position. It was probably a terrible idea, he mused. Constant, regular contact...

Yes, yes... terrible idea...

Steve received a text alert and nodded at Jim. "Moran's arriving. We'll pick him up at the car park to go over details and then head to the warehouse from there. Yes?"

"Absolutely, yes..." Jim said, distracted by his sniper's name being spoken aloud. God, he would be in the car in less than a minute... he straightened the lapels of his jacket and brushed lint furiously from the arm of his coat.

When he felt Steve observing this, Jim shot a glare at him. Steve wisely looked away without making eye contact. The car was rolling down the street towards the car park, and pulled in. From the cover of the tinted windows, Jim watched Moran waiting - he looked imposing and lethal as ever. The door opened, and Moran looked inside, then slid into the seat opposite Steve.

Jim stared straight ahead from behind his shades while Steve gave instructions to Moran. God, this was so boring... Jim leaned forward with his arms on his knees, and his leather gloved hands clasped.

"Not getting a lot of sleep, Moran?" he asked pleasantly. "I can recommend a good eye cream..."

God, he loved being a shit...

He lowered his head so Moran could see his eyes behind his shades, and smiled fiercely at him.
Sebastian, in decent enough shape after five hours of sleep, shower, coffee - and even a shave - watched the familiar black car approaching. He knew he ought just be glad that things had cooled down a bit after the somewhat... charged exchange between himself and the boss the other day. He also couldn't complain about work being unchallenging or dull (except the one job probably put in his way out of sheer spite, to ruin what otherwise would have been a night off) - so why the hell did it still feel a bit dull? And why did this feeling dissipate completely by merely getting into that same car he couldn't get out of quickly enough the last time? Moriarty barely seemed to even acknowledge his presence, dark glasses impenetrable as ever. Sebastian concentrated on Steve who ran him through the job ahead, as concise and professional as before. Suddenly Moriarty leaned forward, addressing him. Sebastian found his gaze riveted to the leather-clad hands, before his eyes rose to the face of the man, taking in the fierce grin on that mouth – that mouth which could go from sneering to sensual and back in a blink.

The snide little quip confirmed his suspicion about the man being fully conscious of what he'd inflicted upon Sebastian over the past few days. He was then offered cosmetic advice by the little prick...

"Thank you, Sir," Sebastian answered blandly. "I will surely try to buy some. I assume it works better than the concealer?"

Because yes, it was barely noticeable; but no, bruises didn't fade within five days, not completely. Sebastian wondered if whoever put the bruises there still breathed. He guessed not.

Jim laughed and looked out the window. Jesus, the man got away with saying things that would get most men killed...

"Well, Moran... sometimes there are things in this world that need to be concealed." He ran a gloved hand slowly down the tinted window. "Under the surface is where we find the very best secrets... and the very best surprises! Let's get this meeting over with, and then we can have a conversation... shall we?"

He got out of the car, not bothering to look back, but noting Moran's respectful "Sir".

The meeting was uneventful compared to the last one. Being criminals, there was an ever-present air of tension and readiness to spring into action if needed. Details were discussed tersely and a re-negotiation was proposed by the arms dealer. Jim's response was to talk about what he'd heard had happened to the last man who wanted to change the details of their original agreement... the scenario involved a series of warehouse explosions that destroyed his incoming shipments.
"... and no one could figure out how the man had come to be chained to a shipment container of his own AK-47's!" Jim said in a shocked conspiratorial tone. "But I suspect foul play... you don't think it was..." Jim looked around, "suicide, do you??"

The arms dealer sat stiffly at the table, and shook his head.

Jim echoed his movement with a mocking smile. "Because that would be such an elaborate suicide! One hardly needs to go to all that trouble... when all one would need to do is go back on a business agreement!" Jim's expression grew concerned. "Do you ever feel like life is too much? Do you ever think of leaving this world? Because I'm here for you, Hugo. And the world can be a beautiful place when you have piles and piles of lovely money and no foolish ideas that get you into terrible trouble."

Jim clasped his gloved hands together. "So what do you prefer, my dear? To contemplate the cold bleakness of existence... or the sweet comfort of piles and piles of lovely money?"

Hugo watched him carefully. "The original deal works fine for me, Mr Moriarty..."

Jim smiled slightly. "I'm simply delighted to hear that. I'll require the first shipment by Friday. You know how it is... big plans for the weekend!"

Jim stood and shook Hugo’s hand. Then he clasped the man’s hand with his own, and leaned in smiling warmly. "Well, my dear... next time you're considering hurting yourself, you call me right away. I'll put the kettle on and we'll have a nice chat. Everything looks better after a cup of tea and a chin-wag, isn't that right?"

Jim didn't bother waiting for a response or with any farewells - he just got up, and followed by his vigilant bodyguards, returned to the car.

Once he settled into his seat, he pulled off his sunglasses and rubbed his eyes. "Why must they all be so vexing? And yet if you kill everyone who annoys, there's no one left to do business with or to employ! So you have to give friendly warnings, and hope for the best..." he sighed.

Jim leaned back in his seat and crossed one leg over the other. "Now, Moran - you've had a very good week, and done solid work. I don't have to tell you it takes a lot to impress me. But I have a good feeling about you..." Jim tilted his head. "Where you'll end up remains to be seen. But we could continue trying you out in different scenarios to see where you fit best. Including working with me directly. I'd like you to start learning more about our organization - if that suits you, of course..." Jim said in a lazy voice.

"Do you have any preferences we need to know about, anything you like to do best? Or are you more of a soldier - do you prefer to just be pointed in a certain direction and do what you're told?" A sly smile could not be contained even though Jim tried to keep his face expressionless - so he gave up, stared at him with gleaming eyes and threw in a raised eyebrow for fun.
The meeting went smoothly, although Sebastian realized that in order to do his job well and stay alert, he literally had to tear his attention away from the mesmerizing sight of Moriarty simultaneously charming and scaring his business partner into compliance. And it already was quite a good insight into the mechanisms of how all this worked. An old wisdom brought to perfection: kill one and you keep a hundred in line. Occasionally going to absolute extremes meant exactly that: you only had to do it occasionally; fear and apprehension took care of the rest. That, plus leaving the impression of being the most dangerous and unpredictable shark in the water.

Sebastian did appreciate that afterwards Moriarty returned to a perfectly normal conversation with him, again bringing up the subject of future prospects working within his organisation.

"Yes, that would suit me, of course..." This time, for once, he chose his words carefully, even though the little underhand slight - whether directed at him or soldiers in general - riled him a bit.

"I've just never been that big a fan of Tennyson, Sir."

'Ours not to reason why, Ours but to do and die' had never been his motto. The former sentiment continued to get him in trouble. The latter he’d managed to avoid, although he’d had his close shaves.

"I'm good with men, give me a rabble and I'll give you back something reliable."

Maybe not the best topic to get into, with Steve sitting right opposite, as Sebastian had no desire to go up against him, or even make an enemy there... - but he had been asked, and now was not the time to be meek. And yes, he might have had problems when in the military, but it had never been the rank and file he'd had them with.

"But I'd also want to keep my own skills honed." If you didn't use them, you didn't stay at the top of your game. "So generally I'm open to anything, as long as I don't end up chained to a desk."

He didn't avoid the stare of the gleaming dark eyes trained on him, but he did wonder how he'd ended up with that very vivid image of himself chained to a desk.

"Oh, not a desk? We'll bear that in mind..." Jim barely kept his smirk in check. "But you say you could whip the rabble into shape? That does sound promising, Moran... we've had a difficult time with reliable employees, as you know. So, any expertise you could apply to the matter would be greatly appreciated...

Steve will start to give you assignments where you head teams, and slowly you'll determine which
men you want for which jobs. You'll be able to decide who you want to train further, promote, or terminate. And as requested, you'll continue to do assignments that keep your skills honed - wouldn't want to see such formidable abilities go to waste!

Oh look, you're home and it's not very late. Plenty of time to have a nice, relaxing evening..." This time Jim didn't bother hiding his smirk.

"As for Tennyson, I am curious which quote caused offence... surely not, 'And out of darkness came the hands that reach thro' nature, moulding men'?' Jim asked in an innocent voice. "No? Oh, don't tell me, I'd like to guess. If I get it in five guesses, what shall I win? I do love games, you'll think of a prize for me, won't you?"

He grinned and extended his gloved hand for Moran to shake. "Congratulations on your promotion, Moran - good work. You should celebrate with a restful evening. Have a hot chocolate and an early night," he suggested as Moran got out of the car.

Jim ducked his head to hide his secret smile. No way was Moran staying home tonight... and no way was Jim letting his hedonistic ways go unchecked...

See you tonight, Moran, he thought, beaming.

~

Sebastian, deliberately ignoring the first remark, paid close attention to everything else, and it sounded like a job that fit him like a tailor-made suit. He also had no doubt Moriarty knew exactly which quote he'd referred to, but the one he came up with was appropriate in its own way. And if the boss wanted a game and five guesses, he could provide as a prize... a travel-sized trivial pursuit, maybe?

But the congratulations really did sound genuine and there it was again, another near imperceptible shift of things clicking into place.

"Sounds perfect", he answered, honestly and without hesitation this time, and then he smiled... not a grin, not a smirk, but his really big smile, and it was the first time that Jim was treated to it. It always had an air of a tiger showing his teeth. It could be playful, wild, sometimes voracious, or it could be a near-laugh, and sometimes even be a bit scary, but it always seemed to contain a few more teeth than an average human could possibly possess.

Something of it still lingered after they'd shook hands, Moriarty beaming as well, and Sebastian got out of the car.

Needless to say, he found a restful evening and celebrating to be mutually exclusive concepts.

~
Jim was enjoying a rare glass of wine as he listened to Britney Spear's Blackout album and prepared for the evening's hunt. He wouldn't know until Moran was on the move what kind of establishment he'd end up at. But he'd hazard a guess that it would be a club again... Gay or straight, that was the question... it would be easier to pick up in a gay bar, but he wasn't sure if Moran would try something completely different from the last disastrous evening. Jim would have to be able to blend into either environment, just in case.

He sipped his wine and surveyed his closet. He pulled out a pair of jeans and threw them on his bed... followed by a v-neck white t-shirt... black blazer... black knit cap. Jim snickered. He had to cover his hair, and look like a different kind of club goer who would wear shades indoors. He selected a flash pair of shades, and tried them on in the mirror with the hat. He giggled, and had another sip of wine. Cool your jets, Jimmy, he chided. You can't show up bombed to a club and expect things to go according to plan...

He placed the wine glass on a table with a loud thump, and began dancing to Gimme More (Junkie XL Dub).

Jim slowly peeled off his clothes as he moved, and threw his clothing to the floor, piece by piece.

We'll keep on rockin' (Keep on rockin')

He snatched up his wine glass, and watched himself in the mirror as he drank it, completely naked.

They keep watching (They keep watching)

He turned the glass upside down and slipped his tongue inside to lick the wine from it, before smiling ferally at himself.

Feels like the crowd is saying

Gimme, Gimme more

Gimme, More

Gimme, Gimme (Bitch)

Jim strutted towards his bed, and slid on a new pair of pristine white Hugo Boss boxer briefs and ran his hands over them, smoothing them out. He looked across the room to the mirror – holding his package, he sharply jutted out his hip and stuck his tongue in a saucy manner.

The clothing he had selected was slowly slipped on as he continued to writhe in front of the mirror. By the time the song was done, he was dressed right down to the hat and shades. His Britney playlist finished and the next song up was The Trammps's Disco Inferno. He grinned as he looked at himself, and slipped a lighter into his pocket. If it came down to it, he'd happily set the club ablaze. He glanced down at his phone and saw that Moran was on the move. Jim's grin faded, and he stalked out of the room. Project Seek and Destroy was underway.

"Burn baby burn," he sang under his breath. "Burn that mother down..."
A little online research, and Jim was able to figure out which club Moran was heading to, from the car. The driver was quick - Jim was inside the club and positioned at the bar before Moran even walked in.

He glanced at the two men he had brought with him, both dressed for the occasion - one was dancing by the cage dancers, looking very much like a hedonistic club kid. The other was on the catwalk above the crowd, making out with someone, looking very much like someone about to score.

Jim grinned to himself as he sipped his vodka cranberry and watched Moran walk in like a predatory cat about to give chase to a gazelle. Oh no, darling... I'm the only one tearing through gazelles tonight, Jim thought. By any means necessary...

He closed his eyes and raised his face to the coloured lights beaming down on him.

Let the games begin...

~

Although Sebastian had chosen a different club, it hadn't crossed his mind to avoid them altogether after his last jinxed night out. He wasn't superstitious. (Nobody would call ditching green sweets from an MRE superstitious, would they? Or not letting anyone else look through the scope of your rifle, or avoiding being the third to a match when lighting a cigarette... That was just plain common sense!)

The music was a bit different but just as loud and feverish as the crowd. Sebastian moved through it, in his hyperalert, feral mood which often came in the wake of a killing spree, waves of heat and hunger emanating from him. Attracting the same sort of danger-seeking prey as the boots and dog-tags. He'd already seen three potential candidates before reaching the bar. Enjoying the stalk and the hunt was part of the fun, and this was going to be a night of celebration...

Justifiably so, he thought, going over the last week and the events of today. He was realistic enough to know that what he'd been offered was different and on a scale far beyond anything that would be in the cards as a freelancer... And he might still tell himself this was the only reason he wanted it, but deep down he knew it wasn't... He pushed money across to the barman, shaking off the flash of an image - a smile, the tip of a tongue, a few drops of a blood-red drink. Jesus fucking Christ, now he was even starting to see things.

An arm was slung around him, which was sufficiently distracting… and then a whole body pressed alongside his, which was even better. A lewd suggestion was whispered in his ear and he laughed, throwing his head back and necking his drink. Then he grabbed the guy - not too tall but dark and handsome - and kissed him, before dragging him almost violently towards the dancefloor. But then, he was drawing it out a bit, not immediately following the suggestion to just stumble downstairs to the toilets. The guy, grinding against him, had one hand on his belt and was running the other one from Sebastian's shoulder down his back as if he wanted to rip his t-shirt off there and then. Sebastian finally returned the favour, and with interest, backing him into a corner, shoving him face first against the wall. Pressing against him, and with a harsh nip at the side of his neck with a whispered prompt, "Let's go…"

To his new friend's place, apparently. Right, now they only had to find a cab. And hope the ride was
short enough so they'd make it into bed...

~

Jim observed Moran on the prowl... and it was a thing of fucking beauty. It nearly took his breath away, and then he reminded himself that Moran was hunting for other game than him. He narrowed his eyes and finished his drink. Well, it's not like he could do anything with the man, he told himself and slammed his glass down on the bar. He'd just promoted him for fuck's sake...

Someone was approaching Moran. Pressing against him. Whispering in his ear.

Jim watched with the now-familiar sensation of cold fury pouring through him as Moran responded with a laugh, and fucking kissed him.

Right. Playtime's over.

Jim spoke sharply into the microphone hidden in his lapel, and watched as his two men strode towards the front and back exits.

Jim then sent a quick text and made a beeline for the front door. Moran was dragging his partner to the dance floor, but Jim suspected it wouldn’t be for long.

When Moran and his would-be partner passed a few minutes later with smiles and purpose in their steps, Jim was chatting someone up with his British accent, and barely stopped as he slipped a needle into the right buttock of Moran's companion. The man winced and pressed his hand to his arse cheek, but he seemed far too distracted to take much notice - as Jim's operative was screaming at another man about having cheated on him, and then slapping him across the face. Moran's companion seemed shocked, then amused, and then a bit disoriented, as Moran steered him outside.

Disorientation was a side effect of the drug he'd been injected with, similar to nitrous oxide... it would be followed by slurred speech, laughter, dissociation and mild hallucinations. It would appear as if the man had taken a recreational drug that had just kicked in. Jim assumed this would be enough to deter Moran, but just in case something went wrong with the drug administration, he had a back-up plan. A cab was pulling up to the club just as Moran and his companion were heading out. Jim watched from the doorway as Moran hailed it, and helped his new friend in.

He watched as another car began to follow the cab. Then he went back to the club to have another drink, as he waited for the report. The car, driven by a former professional race car driver, would be slamming into the back of the cab within a couple of minutes. The cab, driven by a former stunt driver, would be veering sharply on impact and careening (safely) into an immovable object of his choice - tree, mailbox, a parked vehicle - didn't matter to Jim. Personally, he was holding out hope for something ironic. If the cab hit a van owned by a bakery, for example... it would be so poetic ramming into a vehicle for transporting sweet temptations...

No sweets for you tonight, darling, Jim thought with satisfaction and brought an icy rum and coke to his lips.

By the end of the drink, he heard a text alert and reached for his phone.
Someone was making a scene by the front door, but Sebastian didn't pay much attention to the commotion, unlike his companion, who stopped to watch. The next moment he looked a bit blankly at Sebastian, finally giggling when he was steered outside. The cab wasn't a problem, one was pulling up and stopping right in front. Sebastian's catch began meandering around it, trying to get into the driver's door. God, the bloke was more drunk than it had seemed... Sebastian snatched him back and made sure they both ended up in the back.

“Sorry 'bout that”, he apologized to the cabbie, “we're going to... Right, where are we going?” He looked at his companion, who seemed happy as a clam, and about as eloquent.

“Where do you live?” Sebastian nudged him slightly, which produced another fit of giggles and a slurred “Homey, honey...“

This... was not going well. Sebastian let his head drop forward, pressing his face into his hands, muttering something very blasphemous. The cabbie meanwhile was pulling back into the moving traffic and asked again where he was supposed to be going. Sebastian searched through the jacket of the man beside him, who was still in stitches, until he'd found a wallet and an ID.

“Norwood R... - no...”, he held the guy's driver's licence up into better light. “Norwich Stree – fuckinwatchout-!!“

Plenty of light, all right – glaring headlights zooming in on them from behind, to be precise. The resulting crash followed almost instantly, and Sebastian was flung against his fellow passenger – whose amusement rose exponentially - and in the next moment against the back of the driver's seat.

The speed of the cars was luckily slow enough for the only casualties being two dented cars and one very dented royal mailbox. Sebastian started feeling like he was in an absurd film ('Groundhog Day' came to mind) and the next scene he watched happening was a lively shouting match between the two drivers. Strangely, nobody seemed to have any inclination to call the police. Sebastian had gotten out of the car too, and around it quickly enough to keep his – by now really helpless – prey from ambling into the road and oncoming traffic. He took him a few steps down the street, put the wallet back into his pocket and flagged down another cab. He bundled the man, by now mumbling unintelligibly, into the back seat – looking at his expression left him wondering if he even knew how he'd gotten here, or his own fucking name, for that matter.

“Okay...” he patted his shoulder, “Homey honey...“

_I bet you'll be quite safe – without me_, he thought.

Then he told the cabbie the address he'd seen on the driver's licence, asking him to make sure his fare got home safely.

He himself chose to walk - back to the club. It wasn't much further than three or four blocks, but
enough time and fresh air to clear his mind somewhat. But he was also getting more annoyed by the minute. So no, he wasn't even going back to score (talk about a spoiled mood)... but maybe he could test a little theory that had been forming... and although it was downright fucking ridiculous (but not at all funny), once it had taken hold, he couldn't shake it, either.

So when he entered the club a second time that night, *feral* didn't begin to describe how he felt...

He went back to the bar to get a drink, scanning the crowd. As expected, he didn’t pick up on anything that helped him with his theory. But as always it didn't take long until he had company, a ginger this time. Without any detours to the dancefloor, things got heated very quickly and they were on their way to the back door. Halfway there Sebastian started to drag his feet a bit. Kissing the guy, this time he allowed himself to be the one with his back against the wall. He didn't try to scan the crowd anymore, but, whenever he got the chance, he was watching it the way he would observe any terrain concealing an unknown danger: not focusing on anything in particular. More often than not, whatever was out of place was a pattern of very minute things that you caught out of the corner of your eye...

~

Jim scanned the texts he received from the drivers. Mission accomplished - after the crash, the would-be companion was in a cab heading elsewhere. Moran had walked off alone. Jim checked his tracking system, and saw Moran was heading back to this neighbourhood.

Jim shook his head. Determined fucker, wasn't he... Jim ground his teeth together. Good thing he'd stayed put... because if he'd had to return here a second time this evening, he would have been *very put out*.

He sighed heavily, and reviewed the next phase of the plan. He couldn't repeat anything he'd done, and as it was, Moran was likely becoming suspicious. Or if he wasn't, he certainly would be after Phase 2. Jim laughed quietly to himself, before speaking tersely to the men who were still waiting in the club.

Jim went to a bar at another location of the club, and ordered water with lime and lots of ice. He saw Moran appear through the front door, taller than most in the crowd, looking like the embodiment of violence. Jim smiled.

That made you furious, did it, darling? Better steel yourself for what's coming next...

Jim rolled his eyes as Moran was approached by *yet another* tramp in a tight tank top. Jesus Fucking Christ, this was getting tiresome...

He sighed and watched while he drained the water in the glass.

Moran was heading for the back alley... but stopping first to fucking make out and - wait... now why would he be stopping to make out? This wasn't exactly a romantic moment before heading to the back alley for a blow job or a fuck. Also, Moran was looking at the crowd like a bloody terminator...

Jim bit back a curse. He rapidly reviewed all the possible scenarios he had accounted for, and all the responses... not one of them was remotely subtle.

Well. Then there was no point in going for subtlety, was there...
Jim sent a quick text to his men and turned away from Moran, covering his nose and mouth with his hand. Partly to laugh and partly to take in a deep breath...

There were was a pause and then came the sound of an explosion and screams... smoke billowed out along the ceiling... and the hanging catwalk was collapsing.... there was the sound of grinding metal, and people were hurtling to the ground, shrieking - Jesus, it was only one storey off the ground, Jim thought in annoyance. Nothing but scrapes, concussions and maybe some cracked bones... People were so dramatic, he thought as he let himself get swept along with the hysterical crowd.

By this time the smoke alarms had been set off, and the entire club was being doused with cold water. More screams, more rushing... ah, humans were such a predictable species, he thought with delight.

The ginger tramp was slipping and sliding over to an equally damp friend, and pulling him towards the door. Aww. What a peach.

Jim quickly looked for Moran and saw him walking purposefully with the crowd, with his golden hair plastered to his head. He was not rushing even a little... but damn if the man wasn't heading right in his direction. Jim picked up his pace slightly. Not ready for a confrontation, he thought - not tonight, darling...

But then, there was a bottleneck at the front door as someone slipped on the wet floor and went down hard, banging their head - and people were standing around waiting for them to be helped up instead of rushing through the door.

What the hell? Since when did panicking crowds develop conscientious behaviour?? Jim thought disdainfully, but his heart rate was increasing and there was a feeling of panic and excitement building in him.

Be invisible, Jimmy... there's absolutely nothing to see, he thought as coolly as possible, and huddled behind someone tall as Moran approached.

His breath hitched.

Keep walking, Moran... keep fucking walking...

~

A blast, tearing metal, falling masonry, screams and smoke... Sebastian had been mentally prepared for something, but not for this. His body had instinctively decided to fend for itself and taken a dive – towards the nearest structure with the best chance to be left standing – stairwell, doorway... corner wall, in this case. Then his brain obliged by signaling not to be daft, because this hadn't been a substantial explosion. His hearing was intact, no limbs were missing and no ceilings coming down. The wet trickle on his face... was just water from the sprinklers.

He seemed, for the time being, the first and maybe only one in the club to regain his composure. Back on his feet, he took care to stay there - out of the way of the ensuing mass panic. He didn't have to concentrate very hard to see a shift in the pattern of the crowd now, did he? The hanging catwalk was literally just that - hanging by a thread, one side still attached to the ceiling. The rest, twisted and warped, had taken quite a few people down with it... and would make for a busy night in the trauma unit of the nearest hospital.
Jesus bloody Christ. Talk about a theory tried and tested. No matter how surreal the whole thing felt...

The seasoned Londoner knew in a terror attack to half expect a second hit, somewhat delayed after the first, but Sebastian would have staked his first month's wages that there wouldn't be one... When the acute danger of getting trampled subsided a bit, he let himself drift with the crowd towards the front door, observing again, but not holding out much hope of seeing anything useful...

And he didn't.

Then he was outside, walking away. He lit a cigarette, then turned around and took in the chaos and the red and blue lights of the arriving ambulances. Feeling simultaneously exhilarated, furious, and a bit giddy, he took out his phone and typed a message.

Strangely... me trying to shag people seems to endanger their health nearly as much as me trying to shoot them. SM

~

It's amazing how it always worked... if Jim didn't want to be seen, no one saw him. Still, he had a sneaking suspicion that Moran had come awfully close to being the one exception to that rule.

(Maybe you wanted to be seen, Jimmy...)

The coy thought surprised him. Don't be daft, he told himself as he hurried with the crowd, away from the club, away from the emergency vehicles, and away from Moran. What possible reason could I have to WANT to be caught red-handed?

(Because it would be... funn...)

He turned a corner and separated from the crowd, feeling exasperated. OHHH... engaging directly with the hot ex-soldier employee would be FUN... you don't say! Really not the point...

(Then what is the point of all this, Jimmy...?)

He sighed heavily as he leaned against a building and pulled out his phone. Because!

(Becauuuuse...?)

BECAUSE if I don't get to play with him... NO ONE can... he thought furiously, and checked his tracker. Moran appeared to be in a vehicle, heading to his own neighbourhood. Thank Christ... he was not in the mood to chase the man all over the city at this hour.

He noticed an unread text. Strange that he didn't hear the notification, but the environment was rather loud and chaotic, and Jim had been distracted by his own absurd line of thought.

He read the message and his mouth dropped open in surprise.

Oh... OH... calling me out so soon, Moran?
Oh, the CHEEK, darling...

He thought for a moment with a wry grin, and then began to type, still leaning against the wall:

*Is this your attempt at a pick-up line, Moran? Intriguingly aggressive, but it's after midnight and some of us have an early morning. Do try to remember who I am, won't you? JM*

Jim sent a quick text for his driver to pick him from the all-night cafe nearby. Then he re-read his sent message to Moran before sauntering down the street, smiling fiercely.

What Do I Get If I Win?

Sebastian was still on the way home - for a change he had picked a cab that went where he wanted it to go - when he heard a text message come in. As he read it, for a hair-raising moment he had the nauseating feeling of stepping into a void...

But no... no - recalling everything, and that meant every single one of his spectacular fails, and the amount of deviousness necessary to orchestrate them, he was still convinced.

He replied:

Yes, Sir. Thing is... that is exactly what I'm doing. SM

A smile played on his lips. He wasn't thrown off by what was now more than a suspicion.

Nevertheless, he re-read the text he'd just received as well. Something about it intrigued -- wait -

The smile became a smirk, while typing again:

Intriguingly ...?

.

.

Should I try again - before midnight?

~

Jim was staring out the window, a smirk on his lips. It had been a good evening, a very good evening - not just despite being called out.

Because of being called out... now that was exhilarating...

Of course, now he was heading to the boring retreat of home, sitting in the darkness with his laptop. This behaving business was tedious. Maybe he needed to return to a BDSM forum, and see what was out there these days... the problem was, it always ended up the same way. Disappointment.

People said they wanted pain and suffering and domination, but... the ones who truly got off on it didn't light Jim's tree, as a rule. They were grovelling little insects, and what the fuck was Jim going to do with a grovelling little insect other than squash it?

And the hot ones... most often, they just wanted to look pretty in leather and chains...

And Jim did not handle it particularly well when his time was wasted.
It seemed infinitely more fun (and far less messy) to play with people's minds online, and then to take care of things himself.

But this was too dull to even consider after the evening he'd just had...

When was the next time he was working with Moran? He checked his phone to refer to his schedule, and saw that Moran would be acting as his bodyguard Sunday evening. Two nights from now... he imagined gleefully how that might go, given the events of tonight... and just then a text appeared.

He opened it and laughed in delight.

Well... Moran was never boring, he'd give him that...

He was wondering how he should respond, and when...

And then two more texts appeared.

His eyebrows shot up towards his hairline.

He stared dumbfounded at the messages, and re-read them.

Oh, this was getting interesting...

Ignoring his desire to tell the driver to swing by Moran's apartment (No, Jimmy... Jesus...), he tapped his fingers against his lips.

After a moment, he typed:

*Oh, Moran... If this organization had a Human Resources department, one of us would be in big trouble...*

A moment later, he sent a second response:

*If there's a complaint, please bring it to me directly. Day or night. I will not rest until you're satisfied with my attention to the matter at hand. JM*

~

Sebastian chuckled when the reply came in. No denials anywhere.

*Gotcha.*

Yes, and what *would* a Human Resources department have to say to that?

By now he was on his way up to his apartment and had just closed the door behind him, when the phone chirped again. Reading the second message, he stopped short, and there it was again: that... decidedly *giddy* feeling...
The reply went out a while later.

_I'll surely bear that in mind. For the moment the matter IS well in hand. SM_

For bloody lack of better alternatives, thank you very much…

~

Jim was just arriving at his penthouse when he heard a text alert. He locked the deadbolts emphatically, then tossed the hat and shades onto the table in the foyer.

_Took you long enough, darling - playing hard to get now?_ he thought, eyes glittering at himself in the hall mirror. Running a hand through his hair, he wandered into the living room and threw himself onto the sofa to read the message.

Jim blinked, re-read it, and blinked again... Did Moran just imply to his terrifying employer that he was going to have a wank??

He laughed in disbelief. Well, the man was audacious and apparently without fear; he had to give him that...

He leaned against the sofa cushion, looking up at the ceiling. What to say, what to say...

As much as he would have loved to start issuing orders about what to do and how (NO, Jimmy)... instead he simply typed:

_All's well that ends well! JM_

A few minutes later, a second text followed:

_Pleased you found a satisfying solution. Was that so hard, Moran?_

~

Sebastian was quite sure now, but it was still mind-boggling. The lengths Moriarty had gone to, and not for the first time, as he now knew...
It was like sitting in a small fishing boat, realizing the cause for your empty nets was the circling shadow of a shark, right beneath you. And instead of rowing to shore, you found yourself longing to trail your fingers through the water...

Or - in this case - keep typing replies to a madman.

Freshly showered, lounging on his bed, and considerably more relaxed now, Sebastian did just that, the game too intriguing and too dangerous, and thus too intoxicating, to just… stop.

**True... could have saved myself the trouble of going out beforehand, couldn't I?**

Which, he started to presume, had been the point? Was he supposed to be grateful for Jim’s generosity in having given him permission to wank?

When the next message came in, there wasn’t even a debate any more whether to answer or not. After all, he had been asked a question, hadn't he?

**Hm... expedient solution, more like. But yes, it was.**

~

Jim was experiencing waves of wild delight every time a new text was received...but it was **dangerous**, and he had to **stop this. NOW please**, before they reached the point of no return.

(Oh, Jimmy... you know you want to...)

He ignored the seductive voice that reached out to him from the dark recesses of his mind. Then he snapped, **WANT has nothing to do with it!** and got up from his desk to go to bed.

(Well, you got his attention... now what are you going to do?) The voice insisted as he padded barefoot down the hall and entered his bedroom.

**Nothing. Sleep.** He threw his phone onto the bedside table with a clatter.

(Boring. Continue!)

**Too risky. Piss off.** He peeled off his jacket and t-shirt, throwing them on a chair.

(God, Jimmy... when did you get to be so **dull**?)

Jim sucked in a breath, and kicked off his jeans.

**I'm not talking to you anymore... you're going to get me into trouble... AGAIN.**

(You get into trouble when you're BORED... don't you, darling?)
Jim sighed, and slid into bed in his white designer boxer briefs. He stared up at the ceiling, then rolled quickly onto his front and snatched up the phone from the table. He read the latest message again.

*I'm having a late-night texting flirtation with an employee who I just promoted to a significant position. We are now coyly referring to how HARD he was when he wanked off. I need to STOP, not make it worse...*

(What if... his significant position expanded in scope?)

Jim snickered at the voice's faux innocence. *Oh, I think that's a spectacular disaster just waiting to happen...*

(No... you think nothing's worth anything if risk isn't there...)

Jim smiled slowly. *You're good, Jiminy Cricket...*

(Of course, I am... now... respond as I tell you to, please...)

Jim slowly typed:

*I'm absolutely delighted for you. It just occurred to me you never said if you liked the Tennyson quote about hands reaching out from the darkness, moulding men.*

Message #2:

*Oh, we were meant to be playing a game! I call it 'Pin the Tail on the offensive Tennyson quote'. Here's my first guess: 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world'. Am I right, Moran?*

He threw the phone back on the table, and pressed his cheek into a pillow. He closed his eyes, smiling widely.

~

Sebastian drew the ashtray on the nightstand a bit closer and snatched up his phone again. Christ, there must be some degree of insanity to find this texting even more thrilling than blown-up clubs and drugged and injured people in his wake …

He drew on his cigarette and blew smoke to the ceiling after sending the answer:

*Actually the quote about the moulding hands isn't that bad. Quite a few layers of meaning, on closer look.*
Teeth smiling around his cigarette on arrival of the next message. Games were irresistible to the little bastard... weren't they?

Okay, pin away! But that was your second guess already. Wrong quote, too. Of questionable truth IMHO, but a bit too run-of-the-mill to dislike.

.

.

What do I get if I win?

~

Jim didn't open his eyes when the next text alert occurred. He paused for a moment. This was getting ridiculous... it was almost one in the morning and he was engaged in a serious flirtfest with an employee. A new employee. He'd been acting like a giddy, psychopathic schoolgirl for days now, but this was enough. He would not be responding to this message, thank you very much. He reached out, snapped up the phone and opened his eyes. Then he cursed and started typing.

Darling - I suggested a game with 5 guesses AFTER I referred to hands coming out of the darkness. I still have 4 coming to me. Guess 2 will arrive when it arrives.

You can choose your prize and let me know. And when I win, you'll find out mine. JM

.

.

.

Hmm... the possibility of occupying a new world is one of the only truths that matter - in my not-so-humble opinion. When I see a new world I'm curious about, I like to try it on for size. Leave no stone unturned. Explore every inch. Strange, it's never FELT run-of-the-mill... Sweet Dreams, Moran

Jim felt like he'd been seduced - the temptation of lying in bed texting with a beautiful, dangerous man had been too difficult to resist and he'd succumbed. But he could still turn this around - the answer would come to him. It had to. In a week they'd gone from growling animals circling each other, to late night saucy texting tramps... where would they be a week from now? Selecting china patterns and planning their honeymoon? Jim rolled his eyes, and shoved his phone across his nightstand.

His thoughts inevitably drifted to thinking of Moran in action, like he had been all week. Shooting Russian gangsters in a warehouse. Diving for cover when a bomb went off. Dragging his prey towards the back door of a club. Jim's hand slowly drifted along his underwear and then under the waistband. His hand closed over his cock, and he exhaled slowly.

He pictured dragging Moran into an alley, then closed his eyes and moaned softly.
Think of someone else, he told himself firmly.

(Sorry, sweetie - we're keeping this one...)

Fuck...

~

Sebastian made an amused little huff when reading the first message, trying with determination to ignore the strange, spine-tingling effect that last sentence had on him - a prickling sensation that felt like the projection of another sniper's crosshairs between your shoulders, but underneath was something else, entirely different... Or maybe not that different. It made him roll over onto his stomach and utter a low groan into the sheets. Fuck!

Out of the corner of his eye he regarded the phone in his hand, when another text came in.

Well, he did remember very well, how, suddenly back on civvy street after his dishonourable discharge, his whole friggin' world had felt blown out of the water. Of course, something like that would be totally alien to you, if you happened to be a brilliant, outrageously megalomaniacal psychopath – then you probably fucking shaped any world you set foot in, as you liked.

He conceded:

*For me the point of questionable truth is: never being too late. But yes, maybe that's a minor quibble. SM*

And *maybe* it was that thoroughly entertaining and – from his perspective – very successful evening, that had put Moriarty in this affable mood, and Sebastian should now just heed the signals. So he typed a virtuous:

*Good night.*

He put the phone back, turned out the light and snapped his eyes shut.

After all, in the end they *had* been back to the totally innocent grounds of 19th century literature... Or hadn't they? Why did Moriarty's description of taking possession of a new world sound so suggestive, more like...

*Fuck's sake, sleep, Moran!*

He dozed off.
And found himself digging his fingers into the blanket to stop his hand inching towards the nightstand again. Success was temporary.

03:17 - the clock on the screen said when he typed:

*And in any world: 5 rounds is just 5 rounds, no matter when you start to shoot.*

He smiled, nestled back into the sheets, and this time was fast asleep within seconds after closing his eyes.

~

Jim opened his eyes and looked at the clock. 7:03 AM - his plans weren't until later in the afternoon, so he had time to sleep some more. He yawned and was about to turn over when - he glanced over at his phone and his eye widened. He'd fallen asleep pretty hard after - oh. *That...* well, he should really not make a habit of pleasuring himself while thinking of - he snatched up his phone. He'd slept through a text alert.

As he read the message, a smile slowly spread across his face. He began to type a response, and then threw his phone down on his bed. Bad enough he'd been texting with Moran at night... he would not start up again first thing in the morning like a lovelorn adolescent.

But - then again, he couldn't just leave a message like that unanswered, *could he??* He grabbed his phone and continued to type.

*However many rounds would please you, Moran - the outcome shall be the same. You'll have your THIRD guess by tonight. JM*

..

*As for the questionable truth you refer to... One tends not to worry about such things when one makes the rules. JM*

Satisfied, he threw his phone on his bed and got up. Ah, yes - he had pulled off his underwear when - Jim shook his head. He padded to the bathroom, and turned on the water, letting it reach a nice level of blasting heat before stepping into the shower. As he lathered up with expensive body wash, he considered tonight. Now that Moran was onto him, would he still try to hook up with someone? Or would there be more texting? And whatever would it be like seeing each other on a job tomorrow?
By the time he was freshly clean, Jim was no closer to an answer...

And by the time evening rolled around, he was climbing the walls. He looked at his phone intently, but didn’t pick it up.

~

No alarm woke him in the morning, and, still drowsy, it came to Sebastian that this was his first day off since starting to work for Moriarty. He opened his eyes and retrieved his phone - seeing there were two messages already, he grinned. He read them and was about to answer, but then restrained himself.

I get it, boss, he thought. Even sticking to the rules, you will still win - and if they don't suit you, you change them.

Which meant Sebastian could save himself the trouble of choosing a prize – like an unimpeded night out for instance - and should rather make the best out of his work-free day...

He had a workout routine for whenever he wasn't pressed for time, that took up about three hours. Which turned out to be quite a lot of time, when your mind just wouldn't stop going in circles around the one thing you'd intended to keep it away from… by the time he was showering, he stopped even trying... Okay, he tried to look at what had been an intoxicating and simultaneously vexing game, from an angle of pure logic and reason, but couldn't make head or tail of it.

And anyway, how had he done it? Sebastian went back over everything. There were no patterns in which haunts he frequented, his decisions were always spur of the moment, and the little fucker might be many things but he sure as hell wasn't clairvoyant!

The possibilities to hide a tracker were virtually endless, and he'd need at least a week and not just a day off to look for them (and probably still wouldn’t find them). But there were some all-time favourites...

In the afternoon Sebastian went out and treated himself to a new pair of boots. Back home he dug out jeans and a t-shirt he hadn't worn in ages, and leaving his flat for the evening's activities, threw on his motorcycle jacket. He also - oops! forgot his phone on the kitchen table.

He even managed to convince himself – for at least ten minutes – that the tingling excitement he felt was due to the impending hunt and not a far more electrifying game…

~

Jim was leaning back on the sofa toying with what his third guess should be, when suddenly he sat upright. Earlier at his meeting, he'd received a report from surveillance team B that Moran was out shopping. And because he'd been occupied with Empire business, he didn't think twice about it. Shopping. Great. Buy yourself something pretty, Moran.

*Buy yourself something pretty.* What would he be looking pretty for, with all the lovely money Jim
had been throwing his way?

Oh....Tonight.

Jim sent an urgent message out to his three surveillance teams for an-up-to-date report. All three immediately replied that Moran was still in his apartment. Jim relaxed slightly. He'd feel a lot better if Moran hadn't gotten rid of all surveillance equipment in the apartment - except for that fucking camera pointing at his bedroom ceiling, taunting Jim with memories of last time. Well, he wasn't going through that again...

Just then - surveillance team C sent an update, only a minute later. Moran was on the move and dressed for tomcatting (as was Jim's interpretation of the itemized clothing).

Jim swore and jumped up. Was he really going to follow the man all over town - again? This time, with Moran knowing about it? This had shades of infatuated stalking, and Jim wasn't happy with that.

He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.

The line from Sun Tzu's Art of War came streaming into his mind at that moment, from the book that had been on his nightstand since the day he had first come to London in his late teens.

So... what? he demanded. I'm supposed to just lie back and let this happen?

(Oh, Jimmy... Did you not just say you make the rules? You don't make the world bend to your desire by lying around in your underwear sending saucy midnight texts... if you want something from someone, get into their head and make them yours first - they'll come to you.)

Jim shivered at the voice's seductive tone.

Who said I want something from someone... this has just been a game... he thought, gritting his teeth.

(If you say so, darling... but when you're willing to concede that this whole thing has been about getting that beautiful man on his knees, underneath you, and in every conceivable position under the sun... you just let me know.)

...

Fuck.

...

FUCK!!!

~

Well, if the night were to end with another disappointment, at least he'd gotten some exercise in, he thought, zigzagging across the city. Because he did pull every conceivable move to shake possible surveillance. Didn't he?

No, he didn't.
Soho wasn’t the Brecon Beacons, granted, but if anything, it would have been easier here to manage to go unnoticed or shake a tail. There were endless possibilities for a nice little game of urban E&E – a maze of streets and buildings and thoroughfares, underground carparks, throngs of people everywhere, busses, cabs, the tube... all of which you could use. So why was he doing it only half heartedly?

The answer was so absurd, it took him a while to see it: that the biggest disappointment would be … everything going smoothly.

The way it used to, before.

Before someone had taken notice and started a game.

Before just about anything that could possibly happen in any club or back alley or car seemed less thrilling than those unfathomable dark eyes watching him.

~

Jim stared across the living room, his eyes unfocused.

Slowly he started nodding his head.

This was not how he played games... he played to win.

He made a couple of calls immediately to two of his surveillance teams.

They were pulled off the target, and assigned to run a couple of urgent tasks. Then when one team had retrieved the cell phone from Moran's apartment, and the other had retrieved from Jim's PA a black box with a black satin ribbon, the teams would meet up. And one man would intercept Moran to deliver the box. And when Moran had opened the lid and pushed aside the black crepe paper, he would discover his own phone and a note.

The note would read simply:

To be fair, you did guess. When the game ends, the board is reset... and players can move unfettered.

No more watching. No more restrained movements. No more intrusion.

And in the end, it's wisest to stick to the path and not plunge into the deep, dark woods.

And when Moran checked his phone, he would find a text:

Round 3: Trust me not at all, or all in all.

After Jim, posing as his PA in a suite one floor below, handed off the black box, ribbon and note, he returned to his penthouse. He wasn't in the mood for his usual frenetic dance music. He scrolled through his collection and settled on some scratchy-sounding songs from the 1920's and 30's. He
wandered down to the kitchen, and made himself a martini. And then another. And then another.

By the time he had started listening to Bessie Smith, he was dancing around the room with his martini glass in hand.

By the time Devil’s Gonna Get You started playing, he’d stripped down to his white undershirt and pants, and had donned a black derby hat and boa. He was quite uncharacteristically drunk as a skunk.

But a very fetching, fragrant skunk, he thought, giggling - he fell onto the sofa, spilling half his martini on the upholstery.

_Ooops! Never liked you, sofa! Out with the new - no, wait... out with the old, in with the new!_

He threw his legs over the arm, and sipped his martini.

_Who wants a dolt of an ex-soldier, anyway..._

"Can't take a feckin' hint, ye tramp!" he shouted.

He giggled madly, jumped up and started singing loudly to the song.

_It's a long, long lane that has no turning_

_And it's a fire that always keeps on burning_

He ground his hips as he sang, and started twirling the boa.

_Mister devil down below_

_Pitchfork in his hand_

_And that's where you are going to go_

He slid his hand over his cock, before dancing slowly and sensuously around the room, with occasional delicate sips of his martini.

Then as the song drew to a close, he tipped his hat over his face, raised an arm in the air and prepared to bring it home.

_I don't want no two-time stuff_

_From my regular man_
Don't want nothing that's been used

'Cause it's second-hand

He stepped onto the sofa and threw the hat across the room.

The devil's gonna git you

Oh the devil's gonna git you

Man the devil's gonna git you

Sure as you're born to die

With this, he fell onto the sofa, giggling maniacally.

If Moran the Moron doesn't want THIS... HE'S the mad one... he pouted, squeezing his eyes shut and letting his head dangle off the sofa.

(Don't you shed a single tear, my darling! By the time we're through with him, he'll be mad with desire for you... that's a promise.)

Jim murmured softly as he drifted off and by the time the martini glass smashed against the floor, he didn't hear a thing.

~

It was that time when the heartbeat of the city started to change, from the hectic pace of the day, to the slower, slightly feverish pulse of the night. The streets of Soho were still populated with tourists, but other creatures were intermingling with them, all varieties inhabiting the dark. To pick up, you might not even have to go to a club, and could find what you were looking for on a street corner... And seemingly Sebastian's little ruse had worked, or Moriarty's men weren't that good, he thought. Just then, someone briefly blocked his path, then disappeared into the crowd again quickly - leaving Sebastian looking at the little black box that had ended up in his hand. Somehow it didn't even occur to him to be overly surprised... his judgement had apparently been premature.

The box was much smaller than the last one. No red satin bow this time, but a black one. Stepping into an archway he opened it, and snorted softly. Someone had obligingly followed him to bring him his mobile. And a note...

He read it. And read it again. By all appearances just an amiable, friendly message... except it wasn't. Every word conveyed associations … seeping under his skin like the black ink it was written in, fucking with his mind.
Assurance was just the surface. Beneath it: Seduction. Danger. Promise.

Black box, black bow, black wrapping, and the note... the words behind the words like a shimmering, razor-edged shard of obsidian in your palm. Radiating a warning, but also a spell evoking the inexorable need to close your hand around it.

Slowly, and as hard as you could.

He realized even his breathing had changed at that image.

Someone brushed against him, a hand sneaked around his waist, an offer was whispered into his ear... Which, only minutes ago, would have had him pushing the guy deeper into the shadow of the doorway and down to his knees...

Sebastian looked at him without really seeing him. Like you might regard a lukewarm beer placed in front of you, just when you'd gotten a glimpse of the Macallan 25 on the top shelf...

It was only when he was at home again that it occurred to him to check the phone for messages.

He took a swig from his bottle of Jameson, before typing the reply:

*Not the offensive quote either. Three down, two to go.*

.

*Compelling, this one.*

He got up and went into the kitchen. This was ridiculous. Someone was twisting him around his little finger and he... He realized he'd been staring into his fridge for about five minutes, and wasn't hungry at all. With a soft curse he banged the door shut, and went to bed.

After what felt like an hour he padded back into the kitchen and retrieved his phone.

*Never found paths appealing, anyway.*

~

Jim woke up with a thump and a flash of pain. He looked around in confusion.

He was lying on the hardest, cruelest pillow imaginable. Where was he??

He stared at his wooden pillow - no, not pillow - *floor*.

WHY the fuck was he on the floor and what was that *pain*?? His hand touched his face and he winced. His hand closed around ... *glass*?? What the fuck was going on?! There were shards of glass on the floor, and one of them was sticking out of his cheekbone. He pulled out the small jagged piece
and stared at the bloody tip. Gingerly he touched his cheekbone and his hand came away with a smear of blood.

Oh, fucking beautiful...

He hauled himself onto his hands and knees and moaned.

Oh god... why??

He saw a boa hanging down from his neck...

Right... martinis... and more martinis.

And apparently a martini glass broke and a glass shard had lodged itself in his face.

Stellar night, Jimmy...

He got up shakily, and then fell onto the sofa, groaning. His knuckle pressed gently against the wound on his cheekbone.

Oh, sweet Jesus... this is why he didn't drink! The nightmare that followed...

what was he supposed to do, call Steve to come and take care of him?

Strangely, when he pictured someone bringing him lovely fizzy water, and tomato soup with cream crackers, and setting him on the sofa with a blanket to watch films... it was not Steve.

An image of Moran flashed through his mind. Really?? No.

He remembered the events of last night and groaned again. God... Moran probably had hooked up immediately and the little games they'd been playing were at an end.

He dragged himself to the bathroom and examined his face. Well, the cut from the glass wasn't as bad as he thought - it was the hangover that looked worse.

He cleaned out the small wound, applied iodine.

Then he splashed cold water on his face and winced.

After dragging his sorry arse back to the sofa, Jim checked his mobile, expecting nothing. Instead he found three texts...

Oh... he wanted to keep playing the Tennyson game, that's sweet. Seems kind of pointless now...

'Compelling'...?

He raised an eyebrow.

Then he read the final text.

His mouth dropped open.

OH... you don't send a message like that to the big bad wolf if you don't intend to offer up your tender throat...

Jim considered this. He toyed with different responses, and finally settled on this one:
No... You were made for more dangerous journeys through the darkness...weren't you. JM

...

Round four: Nature, red in tooth and claw.

Jim blinked at his screen. He had a meeting tonight... somehow, he had to get through this hangover before then... couldn't let Moran see him like this, he thought before tumbling back into sleep.

~

Slowly awakening to the harsh light and the hard facts of morning, Sebastian's subconsciousness drifted back to another fruitless night on the pull. With just a brief delay and a little flush of heat, more came back to him - the memories more rousing than any coffee, as were the two new messages he found on his phone.

His answer to both:

*Quintessence of life.*

But then he started typing again, even though a little voice was screaming that he must be truly off his rocker. But he was as capable of stopping as he was to cease breathing.

... you sure it's even the appropriate end of the donkey you're trying to pin the tail on?

The quotes were actually getting more fascinating with each guess, which wasn’t the point of the game, surely?

*You're meant to be looking for the offensive quote. Glad number five is coming up, or even I might have to review my opinion of that pompous aristocratic toser.*
Jim was wandering through a dark forest... and every time he saw the lit path, he retreated. He had to look for something, and it wouldn't be found on the path.

Eventually he came across a small dark house, and he pushed the door open.

He walked through a dark room, saw the faint outline of a staircase... walked up slowly one step at a time and then he was stumbling down a dark hallway, trying doorknobs desperately.

Each door was locked except the last one.

He walked in and saw the faint outline of a bed, and - something in the bed. A dark shape rose from the bed, and Jim heard a growling sound.

"NO!" he snarled. "I'M the one who preys..."

He knocked the beast back onto the bed, and firmly pinned down its wrists. He then nuzzled its face, and felt the beast breathing against him...

And he heard it whisper, "Then, prey..."

And that's when he woke up. He looked up from the sofa at the living room ceiling. Fuck - what was he dreaming about? And why did it have to stop??

He pressed his hand to his cock and squirmed.

He still felt the hangover hanging on... but it felt easier to push it aside now that he'd dreamed... whatever he'd dreamed.

He'd had a weak evening - this whole Moran business had thrown him into a tailspin.

But somehow this dream had set everything right again...

On the way to the bathroom to take a shower, he grabbed his phone and was pleased to see two texts waiting for him.

His lips quirked at the first.
His eyes widened as he realized - it was time for this particular game to end. But what did he want to get out of it?

He got up to take his shower, and he didn't even resist thinking of the sniper.

When he was done gasping and moaning in the steamy water, he cleaned himself up and headed back to his bedroom. Time to get ready for tonight and look dominating as fuck.

But first - threw himself down on his bed, feeling refreshed despite the lingering hangover.

In response to the first text, he wrote:

*I aim for the tail end, of course - which do YOU recommend? JM*

In response to the second, simply:

*The game concludes with this round. As the first guess was in person, the final one should be too - after the job.*

Jim paused.

<Send>

~

Sebastian had replied to the first message:

*Has a lot going for it, hasn't it?*

When reading the second one, his first reaction had been the slight twinge of regret that the game was about to end.

Except it wouldn't. What had been meant to be the final round, now felt like an impending shift to another level. Hints had been dropped, but with a sudden thrill Sebastian sensed someone wasn’t stopping the game at all, but rather... cranking it up. Maybe even just... *starting* to play.

Heart in his throat, he slowly pulled the inside of his cheek between his teeth, grinning, and typed carefully:
Can't wait for you to finally really try.

**

He'd spent the day working out, meticulously cleaning his guns, buying groceries and just generally whiling away the time until the assignment in the evening.

How difficult could it be to put the fear of God (i.e. James Moriarty) into an assemblage of venerable druglords, who had been summoned for a backroom meeting. But people who fought vicious gang wars amongst themselves were not to be underestimated, and so the boss had brought nine men, several of whom Sebastian knew from the day with the Russians. Most stayed outside; only Steve, a guy named Terry, and himself were picked for closer protection.

While they received their instructions, Sebastian found it ridiculously hard to concentrate on Steve, and keep his eyes where they were supposed to be. And inconspicuously away from were they were not supposed to be. Fat chance. He still noticed the small, fairly fresh cut on that pale cheekbone, where the mysterious bruises from last week had barely faded yet...

'Private function – NA- meeting' said the board by the door, through which they finally walked in, flanking Moriarty.

“You really do need better bodyguards,” Sebastian muttered, without even turning his head. He let himself fall back, securing the door and also the spot from which he could observe everyone in the room.

~

It was all Jim could do to focus on the task at hand. Especially when Moran had mumbled to him the thing about needing better bodyguards...

*Oh, will you protect me better, big strong soldier?* he thought, wanting to bat his eyelashes.

Why had he said he would give his final guess in person?? He knew the quote, had always known the quote, and Moran knew it.

What purpose was there in having a discussion about anything in person that wasn't business-related? (Because you can't strip him naked and tie him down by text...)

*FUCK*, he thought, eyes widening. *Not during a business meeting for fuck's sake!!*

(Sorry, darling! I'll wait until *after* to tell you to take him back to your penthouse... and strip him
naked… and tie him down…)  

Jim covered his eyes with his hand. 

The man he was meeting asked smugly if he was all right.  

Jim smiled at him, showing teeth. "Oh, just another demonic possession... it's the fourth one this year! The exorcism had to be rescheduled to next week... and now the pesky thing is whispering all sorts of mischief to me! But don’t worry… I’m sure it’s joking...” Jim’s smile faded. “Oh, I... do hope it’s joking...”  

He could swear he heard the tiniest snort behind him. 

He grinned apologetically at the man sitting across from him, who was looking very nervous by this point. He promptly agreed to every one of Jim's demands, and left swiftly.  

Jim leaned back in his chair. "Good rule of thumb, that - when things are going poorly in negotiations, use your demons to your advantage. Shall we disperse?"

Jim's eye flickered over Moran's and he got up and headed to the door. 

~

Try as he might, Sebastian found it hard to keep his mind on the job. But he pulled himself together, especially when there was some kind of deadlock reached in the proceedings, with a lot of haggling but no real concessions from the side that had to be brought to heel. 

Sebastian could only marvel at the sheer nerve of Moriarty to walk into such a stand-off on his own (even with the force of his bodyguards matching that of the opposition easily) and still exude nothing but the absolute certainty, knowledge even, he'd come out on top. His only reaction to things not going too well was just an air of slightly irritated boredom 

And then came that short glimpse of something that was basically the stuff of all the rumours and legends surrounding the man. 

A statement, so screamingly absurd, but uttered so casually as other people would cover a bad hair day with a mention of a barber's appointment coming up. 

Sebastian managed to stifle a laugh (which would not have been helpful, and perilous to boot), by turning it into a barely audible snort … and then into clearing his throat. Doing his best to scowl at the man on the other side of the table, who only gawped at Moriarty now like a startled deer - probably not only remembering, but now also believing every single thing he'd heard about what befell people who were foolish enough not to play ball. 

The meeting ended, the opposition clearing out after agreeing to everything within less than a minute. 

After a word of jovial and absolutely useful advice, Moriarty dismissed his men. 

All but one. 

With nothing more than a brief glance, Sebastian fell in behind him and followed him to the car.
Jim found his heart rate increasing as he walked to the car. His hands were in his pockets and he suspected he could not look more disaffected if he tried. This was the cool, remote place he retreated to when things got a little too heated. There was something strange and intense going on between them, and Jim needed it resolved - yesterday. It had already taken up too much of his time and energy, and now it was making him drink like a fool, get hungover, and become distracted during business meetings.

But it wasn't going away, so... so... well, we'd just see about it, wouldn't we?

Jim opened the car door, feeling Moran's presence looming behind him.

He stood behind the door, arms hanging over it. Jim gave him a feral smile.

"Here's how this works, Moran. I'm going to text you an address - you have your phone with you, I hope?" he looked over his shades at him. "If you want to hear my final guess, you'll be there in forty minutes. But - if you play the game, then you give me whatever prize I claim. Hypothetically, same goes for you if I guess wrong. If you decide these stakes are not for you, no need to show up. That simple, darling. No consequences. And no other opportunities to play the game."

Jim grinned. "And it's a very good game..."

He brushed past the door, and stepped up close to Moran. "You did say you were waiting for me to really try...?" he asked innocently, removing his shades. "I guess I'd have to try good and hard..."

Jim's eyes grew unfocused as he stared up at him, and his mouth opened slightly.

Then he turned towards the car, eyeing him as he went.

"Maybe I'll see you out there... in the deep, dark night..." he murmured, and disappeared into the car.

Behind the tinted windows, Jim could almost believe Moran was staring at him as the car drove away.

Well, this was it... if Moran didn't show, then he wasn't the kind of man he wanted to play with. And if he did... well, then! The events that followed were inevitable as the dawn, and it didn't matter if they happened tonight or five months from now. Jim leaned against the seat as they headed to his penthouse to do a quick wardrobe change. And then he'd be off. One way or another, it ended tonight.

~

Sebastian realized he hadn't been quite sure what to expect... And now there was new bait, another step, another beckoning around the next bend. The lure nicely tied together with a seductive warning, that made it even more enticing...
No, the game was not about to end. Not if he didn't want it to. A decision was placed before him, like a crossroads in an intricate maze: one way to walk straight out, the other following deeper inside. Committing to things not even revealed yet, but every word an insinuation… every turn of phrase had hypnotic power…

Sebastian didn't even have to think about it, although he had an inkling that a travel-sized version of Trivial Pursuit wouldn’t cut it as a prize any more.

It didn’t even occur to him to back out...

Moriarty smiled at him, his teeth a white slash in the dusk, as if he knew already.

And then something changed in the depths of those eyes so they didn't seem to look at him any more, but through him, or into him… and Sebastian felt a sudden sensation of vertigo. It reminded him of walking at night when he had tilted his head back to look up - the sudden shift of perception from familiar ground to black infinity made him trip and nearly lose his footing.

It was only after he'd gotten back inside his own car that he realized that apart from indicating that yes, he had his phone on him, he hadn't uttered a single word. And that he also had no idea exactly how long ago the forty minutes had begun ticking. Jesus bloody Christ, how old was he, fifteen?! His phone chimed, indicating an incoming message, and after reading it, he started the car and peeled off into the traffic.

Regardless when they started – forty minutes would barely be enough to swing by his flat en route to the ShadowLounge.

He walked into the club forty-two minutes later. Wearing the same outfit as on the day the game had started.

~

Jim was waiting in the car a distance away when he saw Moran walking along the pavement. When he saw what he was wearing, Jim smiled to himself. Then he slid on the fake lip piercing, pulled up his black hoodie over his head, and donned his shades - identical to that first night. He opened the door, projecting the energy of a sullen rock star. He walked slightly hunched over like he was trying to avoid attention, with his hands in his pockets. He slid into the club, showed his ID, paid his admission and scanned the club for Moran.

Spotting his target, Jim stalked towards him slowly. Moran was standing at a bar, back turned to him. Jim wove in and out of the crowd, feeling the night in his veins caressing him from inside, like a lover. He felt a smile dance on his lips as the music pulsed - he moved along to it like he was on an invisible track that ended on a spot next to Moran, marked with an X.

Jim drew closer and closer, noting how Moran quickly deflected attention from other people.

Then he noted the man’s height and his shoulders… and his gaze raked down his body, imagining himself pressed against it.

God... you're almost there... get yourself under control, he hissed to himself.
(Sorry... didn't hear a word you said...) his inner voice purred.

Jim shook his head, smiling fiercely. He reached the invisible X on the floor next to Moran, and hunched over the bar. He waved the bartender over, and then glanced sideways at Moran for an instant.

"Fancy a drink, sailor?" he asked in his working-class London accent, and stared straight ahead.

~

Sebastian would have declared anybody insane who'd have told him a day would come when he found people hitting on him at the bar of a gay club just plain annoying. But – here it was. Nursing his nearly empty glass, beneath the initial hum of anticipation a tiny doubt started nagging at the back of his mind - that maybe he'd just been given the runaround, been toyed with – again. Maybe the conclusion was now just being watched and reported, that yes - Moriarty had snapped his fingers, and Moran, gagging for it, had jumped.

But something, on the deeper level of instinct told him not to be silly, Moriarty would come. Half turning around, he scanned the crowd - hardly reacting to yet another chat-up from someone appearing next to him.

“Nah, I'm good,” he replied, without giving the kid - fuck's sake, did he look like a cradle robber? - as much as a second glance.

~

Jim’s drink arrived and he brought it to his lips.

“Oh, ya waitin' for someone then? Maybe you should ditch 'im for somethin’ better, love...” he smiled as he sipped his drink and placed the glass back on the bar with a thump.

~

God, persistent wee bugger. Sebastian just snorted, without even turning his head.

“Right – an' that somethin' bein' you I presume,” he muttered, briefly crossing his eyes in exasperation before downing the rest of his drink.
“Nothin’ here that can compare...” Jim said, eyes straight ahead. “Top or bottom, sweet thing?” He took another sip of his drink.

“Look - irrelevant. Because neither for you.” Sebastian's patience was wearing a bit thin, but despite himself he also was reluctantly amused. “Modesty incarnate, aren’t you?”

And, now looking at that marvel of self-esteem beside him, he had a vague memory. Not fitting into his predatory pattern, a guy virtually... oozing sex left a kind of trace on his radar. And this particular one was from last week. Same outfit too – hoodie, shades...

“I’m alotta things incarnate, mate,” Jim muttered, and threw back his drink. “Bu’... at least m’not a pompous aristocratic tosser.”

He put his glass down emphatically, and wandered off to another area of the club by the dance floor. He watched people dancing, and pulled out his phone, quickly typing:

* Aren’t you going to say hello? 

He stared at the message on the screen, his finger hovering over *Send*. The moment had come...

Sebastian stared at that small cut, high on a cheekbone, suddenly sure he’d seen it just a few hours ago. And then reality went from off- kilter to upside down altogether, as he recognized the insult now coming back at him as his own, typed into his phone just... yesterday?

“Well, fuck me sideways,” he breathed, only gathering his wits back after a few seconds. The hooded figure had already melted away into the crowd.
Following, he finally saw him - facing the dancefloor, fiddling with his phone. He came up behind him, looking over his shoulder to read the message that was just being sent.

“Hello.”

Jim had been absorbed in the writing of the message, far more absorbed than he should have been, considering they were mid-game. He’d thought Moran would take a moment to gather his thoughts, but suddenly his voice was at Jim’s ear, the very moment the message had been sent. He managed to keep from jumping, but his shoulders tightened slightly. *Fuck... get your head back in the game, Jimmy...*

“You took your time, darling...” he said, pocketing his phone but not turning around. “Chatting up a sweet young thing at the bar, were you?”

He turned his head slightly. “I’d stay away from that one. Seems like trouble. And I suspect his intentions aren’t honourable...” he murmured over the loud music, leaning back towards Moran, briefly brushing his left shoulder and hip.

Standing so close behind Moriarty, Sebastian got the satisfaction to sense the tiny start this caused. And although the disguise was still there, it was only just physical. The kid was gone, the hunched posture was gone, the fake accent was gone...

“Believe it or not, he was chatting *me* up,” he smirked. Moriarty half turned, uttering another one of his *seductive* little warnings, and ever so slightly, seemingly accidentally brushing against him. Just a slight touch and yet Sebastian had to fight the sudden impulse to wrap his arm around him, push back that blasted hoodie and sink his teeth into the neck beneath... *Christ!*

“Not honourable, huh?” he muttered back, trying to keep a straight face. “I practically majored in *dishonourable*... and *trouble.*” He pretended to continue watching people dance. "Except for gambling debts - I always pay those."

Jim laughed. “Darling... you were dishonourably discharged, became an assassin, and started
working for the most dangerous man in London... and beyond. Trouble is what runs through your veins... it’s the very air you breathe... it’s what you dream about, long for, hunger for...”

He looked back and held his gaze for a charged moment.

“And it just goes deeper from here...”

He turned again and started moving slowly to the new song that started playing. “You know this is a terrible idea, don’t you? You’re an intelligent, Oxford-educated gentleman... I’m sure you know nothing good could come of it... for either of us, really...” he sighed, pushing back his hoodie and raking his hands through his hair. “One of us should surely do the intelligent, reasonable thing and put a stop to this. Is it going to be you?”

He turned around quickly and grasped his shoulders. He smiled at him and looked over his shades, as he continued to sway his hips ever so slowly to the pounding beat.

~

For what was basically an appreciative, nearly affectionate, and precise vivisection of Sebastian Moran, the man in front of him didn't even need a knife – those eyes, now gazing into his, were enough. Drawing him deeper into what he pretended to warn him about.

And Sebastian came closer.

One little step, and another one.

And, without even realising, moving in time with the music too.

Since when did education and intelligence have anything to do with sanity and reason?

“And you-“ another small step, following... When his arms were grasped, they went around that seductive little devil - but nothing more, just another light touch, while his hands longed to bury themselves in the fabric of the hooded sweater – “You -“, he repeated, "are the fucking genius here. “

His voice low, but so close now, close enough to be heard. “So no, I don't think it's going to be me. “

~

Oh, the feeling of being touched by him, so lightning-quick, feather-soft ... Jim felt electrified by it, by the feeling of Moran’s powerful arms under his hands.

Jim pulled off his shades, slid them into the pocket of his hoodie. He looked at Moran knowingly.

“Even a genius can’t stop a tidal wave from rising... or rushing to the shore... or breaking on the sand...“
He quickly turned again. Moving to the music, he brushed his pelvis against Moran’s achingly slowly and lightly, delighting in how dangerous such a simple action felt. God, how could one man feel so good??

Jim leaned back against his chest, looking up at him.

“Are you up for the final round, sweet thing?” he asked. He raised his arms to the music, and one hand snaked up to run through Moran’s hair, and then down to grasp his jaw.

“Shall we settle the winner once and for all?”

Jim was no longer worried about how this would affect their working relationship.

It was far too late to concern himself with that now...

The lot had been drawn, the die had been cast...

As sure as the sun would rise tomorrow, Jim would have Sebastian Moran.

And in the bright light of a new day, he would know what to do with the ex-soldier he had made his...

~

With the next sinuous turn, Moriarty’s hip slowly brushed against his. And when he leaned back against his chest, Sebastian's breath caught in his throat. It was like stepping into a magnetic field, with a source so powerful it raised the tiny hairs all over your body, made your teeth itch and messed up your heartbeat. Maybe even your brainwaves, making it not only impossible to move back, but overriding the last self-preserving reflex to do so...

Was he up for the final round? Good gracious, even without a word the answer would be more than evident - if the man who’d asked were to lean just a tiny bit closer. Which he did, reaching up to touch him… and Sebastian had to suppress a groan at the feeling of that hand in his hair, on the side of his face... This had to be settled, or it would drive him mad. Both of them.

“About time, don't you think?” he breathed.

Stepping over a brink into the deep dark unknown. Not even caring any more, if there would be a way back out.

He already knew.

And it just goes deeper from here...
Jim’s lips curled into a smile. He was practically glowing with seduction, intoxicated as he was by the sexual chemistry between them. *Chemistry* was right, Jim thought - it felt like one wrong move and there could be a chemical reaction that would level the building... and one of them or both of them wouldn’t walk away.

Jim turned again and this time pressed more firmly against Moran.

“Yes, I’d say it’s well overdue,” he breathed back, fixing him with his stare.

“You understand the rules? I win, you give me the prize I ask for. You win, I give you the prize. Yes? Then here we are... the point of no return...”

Jim ran his hands slowly down Moran’s arms.

He leaned in close and moved his mouth Moran’s ear...

“*Forward, the Light Brigade!*” Jim spoke into his ear like a lover.

One hand moved to Moran’s jaw and the other to his hair.

“*Was there a man dismayed?*

*Not though the soldier knew*

*Someone had blundered.*”

He pulled back slightly and gave him a shocked, sorrowful look.

Jim remained close to his face and lifted a finger to punctuate his words.

“*Theirs not to make reply...*” he said slowly, touching his finger to Moran’s lips.

“*Theirs not to reason why...*”

He pressed his pelvis lightly against him.

“*Theirs but to do and die.*”
He moved his hips in a slow, grinding circle.

“Into the valley of Death”

His hands grasped Sebastian’s lower back and pulled him against his pelvis briefly before swaying again to the music.

“Rode the six hundred.”

Jim’s hand held Moran’s jaw lightly, and his other hand tightened against his lower back.

“Fuck Tennyson,” he purred. “Am I right, soldier?”

He ran his tongue over his lips, and grinned up at Moran, eyes gleaming.

~

To any onlooker they must have appeared like two lovers, rapt, so close to each other, immersed in an exchange of few words, barely moving... lost to the world. A world oblivious to the possibility it might be incinerated, as mere collateral …

“I do.”

Of course Sebastian knew the rules. They were, after all, of such logic and simplicity, even a soldier understood them. Especially a soldier.

Moriarty leaned close, and for the rush Sebastian felt when he heard the first words, neither shock nor surprise could be held accountable. Because he had known all along. Known of course that the four wrong guesses had just been part of the game.

Same as the lines of the poem were used now.

Each delivered, slowly, in a near whisper and driven home by the tiniest move or touch, followed by an even more suggestive one. Just a finger against his lips or a hand in his hair seemed to send a wave of heat down his neck, through his stomach and further south, and it nearly made his knees buckle.

And when the fuck had his eyes closed? He opened them, subtly shifting his feet into a position that was at least slightly more stable.

Slowly he realised a question had been asked.
“Right”, he answered softly. Acknowledging what they both already knew. And yes, fuck Tennyson.

“But I suppose that fate won’t be for Tennyson…” The tiniest smirk. “Am I right?”

And strangely - it was now, in this instance, that Sebastian really understood.

Not that hated lyrical concoction praising sacrifice, but the reason. The explanation.

Why the six hundred had gone.

Why any man would go and enter a place where, with near certainty he would not come back from… at least, not as himself.

Because sometimes... 'not to' was a concept so inconceivable, it was non-existent.

~

“Honey… is that what you think?” Jim chided, a smile playing on his lips. “I need to win a game to fuck someone? No no no, you have it all wrong... The prize is just a kiss, sweet prince – nothing more.”

Jim pushed his finger lightly into Moran’s chest. “Only stipulation is I lead, you follow. Understood, soldier?”

Receiving Moran's assent, Jim returned to moving to the music. He raised his arms, his body pulsing to the beat. He knew without looking that he would be the most mesmerizing dancer on the floor… and that Moran was both captivated by him, and would be his captive by choice, if Jim wished it. And he knew that they were at a crossroads, where the next move that was made determined the trajectory of their relationship.

Jim pulled Moran down into a heated kiss.

He let Jim take the lead, as ordered – that was promising. But he kissed back with a hunger that nearly set Jim’s head on fire.

Jim pulled back just long enough to look at him with eyes burning with desire, and then kissed him again, his tongue seeking entry into his mouth.

Suddenly he felt Moran bang against a wall. Jim must have been inadvertently pushing him across the dance floor. He plastered himself against Moran’s body – and ground him hard into the wall.

He broke away from the kiss and looked at him intently.

“Damn... that was something,” he said, panting slightly. "Of course, now that my prize has been claimed, the game is over. It’s been a delight, Moran…” His face remained close, and his hands curled possessively around his neck and in his hair. His eyes half closed as he looked up at him.
Mesmerized by the game, of course Sebastian kept to the rules, even though he hardly ever relinquished the lead in anything, to anyone. But this... was thoroughly intoxicating. Moriarty’s lips against his tasted of vodka and cranberry and dizzying heat, and ohhh that tongue... His own answered, just barely clinging to some hazy rule of... not taking over. The stationary object his back made contact with at some stage didn't do much to steady the ground beneath his feet. He was only vaguely aware of the low noise he made, sounding suspiciously like a moan, his full body pressing back against the one grinding him into the wall.

The kiss suddenly ended, leaving him breathless. And for a moment he was absolutely incapable of making the slightest sense of the words Moriarty uttered, still close to his ear.

_Game over, thank you very much, it's been a pleasure._

_Seriously?_

_Seriously?_

It put him off-kilter even more than anything that had happened before, and that was quite some feat. Both his hands were on Jim's hips – no idea when they’d moved there – and now one of them slowly let go. He felt like days of blizzard warnings had led up to seeing three snowflakes fall and melt away.

“Well, then I guess-“ he growled softly, “the rules don't apply any more.”

With a short, but efficient twist, he pushed his body away from the wall with enough momentum to turn them both around. His left hand slammed into the wall beside Moriarty's head, somewhat breaking the force backing the smaller man into it. The tightening grip in his hair and on his neck didn't deter Sebastian one bit, quite the opposite - and the kiss that followed spelled fuck the rules from beginning to end.
Jim had considered this possibility, of course... as he considered all potential outcomes of any action. It was how he not only survived for so long but always, always, always came out on top. And he’d wanted to turn the tables with Moran so he no longer had to pursue him... now Moran was exactly where he wanted him - in pursuit of Jim.

But - as he felt Moran’s lips devouring his, he realized dimly - the one thing Jim hadn’t considered was how much he’d *like* it (!!!)

*Oh... god...*

…

He was used to every action - a kiss, a touch, a fuck - being strategic, being part of a power play that he could easily track on his mind map.

But this was someone doing something to him out of *desire*, and Jim found himself... wanting *more*?

What the *fuck*? A big black question mark appeared on his mind map, with bright red lights flashing all around it.

What was he supposed to do, just sit back and enjoy being taken?

…

No.

…

No no *no*…

It was time to get this runaway train under his control again, so he could have Moran where he wanted him. Where he’d wanted him from the moment he saw him...

Jim bit down on Moran’s lip as his hand tightened in his hair. He yanked his head back, and Moran’s eyes flashed - but not with anger. Mmm... someone likes it *rough*.

Jim pulled his head back further to expose his neck, and inhaled his scent.

“Ah, but there are other rules, Moran...” he hissed, “to a much bigger game...”

Slowly he ran his tongue along the man’s throat and under his jaw. Then he paused for just a moment before tilting Moran’s head, holding his jaw firmly and sinking his teeth in the soft flesh underneath.

Jim lifted his head and looked at his sniper’s face. *Someone’s* under a spell, he thought with pleasure...
(Good... then take it to the next level, Jimmy...) his inner voice purred.

*I know what I'm doing*, he thought, feeling testy.

“So, you enjoyed the little game, Moran?” Jim said languorously. “Shall we start a new one? Here’s how we play... I leave. You choose whether you want to play, and you receive your instructions. If you do want to play - we leave the path for good. Nothing but the deep, dark woods as far as the eye can see...” Jim released his grip on his head, and licked Moran’s lips before kissing him hungrily. Then he slid out from the wall, and strode off across the dance floor, disappearing into the crowd.

Before he reached the door, he sent a text:

*I have the most delightful game in mind for you... and there’s hours left to play...*

~

For a moment there was no objection at all, just an eager, hungry response, oh so *delicious*... while it lasted. The sudden yank on Sebastian's hair that ended it, and the sharp sting of pain in his lip felt oddly enough just as sweet... He stilled, neck tense, eyes half closed, poised between compliance and rebellion... and then - yielding, ever so slightly, when his head was pulled back even further. Moriarty's breath ghosted along his throat, followed by his tongue... The sharp nip of teeth sent a jolt of electricity through Sebastian, and he found it nearly impossible to follow the words now spoken. His ears heard them, but whoever was responsible for running cognitive functions between them, momentarily seemed to have gone AWOL. Or into a trance...

He found himself leaning against the wall, trying to get his breathing back under control, his eyes still on the spot where Moriarty had disappeared into the crowd.

The tip of his tongue traced the tingling sensation of that last kiss, which didn't help with trying to gather his wits back.

'*Other rules'* - this much had registered. Wasn't *that* a surprise?

Another game.

And... another warning.

If he hadn't seen enough people blown up in minefields, already believing they'd made it safely across, he might have been inclined to just ignore it.

And yet when his phone vibrated, he pulled it from his pocket, and as inevitable as any gambling addict he pressed, or rather, typed:
It wasn't until he got into the car that Jim's mask came down. He threw himself back against the seat of the car, and closed his eyes. He exhaled long and slow - and when his eyes reopened, he was already on his way home.

Jim heard a text alert and he smiled faintly. He picked up his phone, saw the message and raised an eyebrow.

He responded:

Then we've begun...

Be at the following location within the next thirty minutes.

The rules are fairly simple: Do as I say. Darling.

If you do, it will be a very delicious game.

He included his address and the name to ask for, paused for a moment, then hit Send.

**

Back at his apartment, Jim changed into a white shirt and black trousers. The only thing he was still wearing from the club was his black boots.

He fixed two whisky sours, put on music, and wandered over to a window in the living room. He moved to the beat while looking out into the night sky. Then he pulled his phone out of his pocket, and still moving to the music, typed out a text:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But you have promises to keep,

And miles to go before you sleep,

and miles to go before you sleep.

~

The rules are fairly simple. Do as I say, darling.
The given address turned out to be a posh apartment complex. Sebastian had walked the last two blocks and was now pausing for a moment to look up, heart in his throat, blood racing. The same Sebastian Moran, who’d sworn, not too long ago, that for the rest of his life he would never again follow anyone's decisions but his own - had now acknowledged the rules without question.

Because the pull was irresistible.

Because it was his own decision.

Because the man waiting up there was as different from 'anyone' as possible.

So it was... into the deep dark woods.

No need for an Oxford degree in literature to know that metaphor when you read it. Exiting the cab that had taken him to Mayfair was the equivalent to the point in a fairy tale where clever children took to leaving a trail of bread crumbs (for all the good that usually did)…

He crossed the street to the well-lit and highly monitored entrance.

To be let in you could either swipe a keycard, enter a code or – he pressed the call button. It took a while before he was buzzed in, and, walking across a gleaming marble hall he felt the stare of two security blokes boring into the back of his head. The concierge behind his desk, an elderly gentleman, asked for his name.

“Moran”, Sebastian replied. “For Mr Blaidd.”

The man nodded. “Yes, Mr Moran, you are expected.” Pointing towards the lifts, he added, “The one on the left, if you please. Takes you right up.”

True enough, there weren’t even any floors to choose from, just one, marked with a ‘P’.

And surely it was due to the high-powered engine whizzing him up and then stopping smoothly but abruptly ten seconds later, that Sebastian felt the need to allow another second to let his stomach catch up.

He took a deep breath, and then he stepped out through the doors.

~

The concierge rang up to let Jim know Mr Moran was on his way up.

Jim sipped his drink as he watched Moran on the closed circuit camera. He crossed the lobby,
looking both like he was on a hunt, and in a daze.

Jim chuckled. *Not a good combination, Moran. Get your head in the game or you may just find it on the wall...*

He opened the front door, so when Moran came out of the elevator he would see the open door as he walked down the hall, and hear music playing. Jim turned off the lights, except for the light that was coming from the second bedroom. Candles were burning, but it was less romantic in nature and more to evoke the element of primal danger.

Jim was standing in the kitchen, cutting slices off an apple with a sharp knife and popping them into his mouth. The stage was set and ready for the player to make his entrance...

Jim turned around and stared out the window. Beautiful night, he thought, for the delicious inevitable...

~

One door, ajar, for the one visitor who was expected.

After the bright light in the lift and the hallway, it seemed to breathe *darkness*, carried on the entrancing pulse of the music playing inside. Sebastian's logic and reason might have been in a daze, but his instincts were not. He entered as he would into any room, where just about anything might lie in wait: taking a step through the door and to the side, into the shadows - using the moment to let his eyes adjust.

It wasn't completely dark. Candles flared up in a slight draught. They illuminated the surroundings in a way that didn't make you expect a dinner table and champagne cooler but rather... an ancient slab of stone and a bound animal, waiting for the knife.

Sebastian carefully closed the door and ventured further.

The knife for the moment was being used to cut up an apple, in the hands of the man that stood in the kitchen.

The slouch was gone, as were the hoody, shades and lip piercing… not even in a Westwood suit and cashmere coat had James Moriarty ever looked as stunning as he did now.

~

Jim gave a small smile and sliced off another piece of apple. His tongue slipped out as the apple slid in his mouth.

"Welcome, Moran..."
He threw out the apple core, then washed and dried the knife.

He sauntered into the living room with the two whisky sours. He held them both out, indicating Moran should take one of his choice.

"You're going to need it," Jim said with an innocent smile.

The glass from the left hand was selected with an arched eyebrow.

"Shall we toast something...?" Jim said lazily. "To knowing each other? And if that goes well... to a second time?"

The tension in the room shot up even higher than it was when Moran first entered like a soldier surveying a space for threats.

Jim's grin grew more sly. "Awfully presumptuous of me, wasn't it? Assuming that's what you came here for - on a Friday after midnight?"

He took a step closer to him. "For all I know, you're interested in stimulating conversation... rather than stimulation of a coarser variety..."

Jim dipped his finger in Moran's drink and licked it suggestively. Then he dipped it again and held his finger up to Moran's mouth.

"Or maybe it's both?" he asked, eyeing him as he sipped his drink.

~

And on they went, the little head games - taunting, putting him just a tiny bit on the back foot and at the same time irresistibly drawing him further in.

Mentioning the chance of a second encounter gave reassurance he'd survive the first; 'if all went well' contained the possibility he might not.

Letting him chose from two glasses, Moriarty could easily trick him into taking the right, or rather the wrong one - depending on perspective. One would think a roofie quite unnecessary, with Sebastian present and committed to the rules; but the hint he'd 'need the drink' seemed to entertain the possibility he might not stick to them, with what was about to come.

Everything had a double and triple meaning.
Sebastian just raised an eyebrow and took one of the glasses.

Which wasn't drugged, as Moriarty's lewd little gesture sweetly demonstrated. After the tiniest pause, the tip of Sebastian's tongue traced the sweet, sharp tang of whisky and lemon along the offered finger. Then his lips closed around it, and then his teeth. Not enough to seriously hurt, but indicating... they could.

He let go, and smiled.

“To knowing each other”, he agreed, clinking his glass against Moriarty's. “Talking 19th century literature to strangers is just so... indecent, don't you think?”

~

The feeling of Sebastian's tongue on his fingertip... Jim had to suppress a shiver.

Fuck...

By the time he pulled it slowly into his mouth, another shiver was rising.

He barely managed to squash it in time, and then he felt teeth...

Fucking HELL, Moran...

His eyes were probably glazing over at his point. Fuck it. By the time Jim was through with him, Moran wouldn't be thinking clearly enough to remember such a trivial detail...

His smile grew sly. "Mmm. I like to think so. But come now, my dear! We're hardly strangers... although I'll admit, my knowledge of you surpasses yours of mine. Hardly fair, is it..." Jim pouted, and sipped his drink. "Luckily I know the perfect icebreaker! And you'll know far more of me than you do at this moment... Shall we give it a whirl, soldier?" He took another sip, watching him. Then he traced circles with the damp finger on Moran's hand holding the glass, and slowly crunched a piece of ice in his teeth.

~

Sebastian, still smiling, downed half his drink in one go, the fiery bite just as satisfactory as what he'd witnessed: a reaction, checked immediately, but there nonetheless. Another moment of zero objection to a little waywardness.

Of course, Moriarty's nonchalance was restored immediately.

And true, they were no strangers - but, as Sebastian just realised, it was the first time they were in the same room together with no one else present.
Moriarty regarded him while crunching a piece of ice, and it reminded Sebastian of a predator's teeth crushing bones. The heated trail down to his stomach wasn't solely due to the whisky any more, as a finger lightly and slowly drew patterns on the back of his hand.

“By all means,” he said, necking the rest of his drink, and surely *that* was what made his voice husky, “I think we shall...”

~

A smile played on his lips as Jim received Moran's acquiescence, and tucked it away. He drained the rest of his drink, while observing him over the rim of the glass.

"Well then... I'd like to invite you upstairs... so far from the path it can't even be seen anymore..." Jim swiped the glass from Moran's hand and placed both on the table with a pronounced *clink*.

"Come with me... *Sebastian*..." He stretched out his hand and Moran took it.

It was the first time he'd said his name, and he ran his tongue over his lips to catch the taste of it before it dissipated.

*Sebastian,* he thought. *Sebastian*...

He turned and headed up the stairs, pulling Sebastian behind him.

Far from the path...

And into the deep, dark woods.

They walked silently up the stairs...

and down the dark hall...

and stopped in front of the second bedroom...

Light could be seen under the door.

Jim glanced back at him, flashed him a smile with teeth.

"You like adventure, don't you?"

Then he pushed open the door. And revealed a room with a four poster bed with a black canopy and black satin sheets, and various implements on the walls (a variety of restraints) and ceiling (a panel with hooks) A couple of pieces of equipment that were clearly of the BDSM variety. And a large
black cabinet with several closed drawers.

"Do you want to leave?" he inquired silkily, let go of Sebastian’s hand and walked into the centre of the room.

He slowly unbuttoned his white shirt to reveal a white undershirt, and rolled up his sleeves.

"Or do you want to go deeper into the woods than you've ever gone before?"

~

The way Moriarty said his name was strangely hypnotic... It felt like the lick of a flame curling around him. Sebastian's hand closed around the one that was offered to lead the way. He followed, up the stairs, and along a dark hallway.

Yes, he was the adventurous sort...

“Way too much, some would say…”

But still he blinked when the door was opened. To the one room with the lights on.

*Jesus fucking Christ! 19th century literature, indeed...* only the aristocrat whose fantasies might have inspired *this* had been imprisoned for his writings in the 1800’s, and ended up in an insane asylum.

The man beside him intently watched his reaction.

The hand which had been guiding him up here left his, and Moriarty went ahead, walking into the room. Sebastian knew he was being given one more opportunity to back out. To reconsider, to – literally, by the look of it - *save his skin*. Maybe even more than just that.

The sight of *this* man, standing in the centre of *that* room, unbuttoning his shirt and rolling up his sleeves – about to get to *work* - should have any sane person turn on their heels and run.

Sebastian didn't.

But then - what had brought them here - brought *him* here – hadn't been the allure of a cozy night by the fire, discussing *Mansfield Park*. Or even the illusion that they were heading for a lively bout of straightforward, unadulterated sex.

(A fair description for the encounters Sebastian usually had, yet most likely not something James Moriarty had ever done in his life.).
No, the deep dark woods were home to a different kind of animal altogether.

And now it was looking straight into his eyes and beckoning him to come in.

Sebastian followed.

“Wouldn't want you to be alone out there”, he said quietly.

~

The words sliced through him like a shock.

Alone?

How else would a predator operate?

Like there was an alternative??

Awfully presumptuous, soldier... to think it could be you.

To think, it could be you, Jim heard whispered through his mind, and irritation and desire sparked through him.

(Relax, Jimmy... I think he's sweet), purred his inner voice.

Oh, for fuck's sake...

Time to get this little journey of discovery underway.

"Come here, sweet thing..." Jim said in a voice like honeyed wine.

He watched as Sebastian stalked towards him.

Oh no, darling... it's not your hunt...

As the music played, he felt serpentine energy subtly move through him side to side.

"Remember, Sebastian," Jim sang as Sebastian approached. "The game is to do what you're told..."

Jim strode to the cabinet and pulled open a drawer - he lifted out two leather wrist cuffs with metal O rings attached by a long chain.

He took the cuffs in one hand and flung the chain towards the floor where it fell hard with a loud
"Well, darling... I'm sure you suspected it would come to something like this...." he said moving towards Sebastian slowly. "So let's cease and desist with all the coy games. Do you willingly put yourself in my hands, Sebastian?"

Jim placed a hand in the middle of his chest and slowly moved down to his abdomen and then further down to his groin.

His hand firmly cupped the man's cock and he felt his eyes gleam as he moved his face close to Sebastian's.

"I promise you, sweet thing... my hands are an unforgettable place to be," he purred. "So if you want to feel them on you... hold your wrists out for me, darling..."

~

Sebastian stepped across the threshold and walked towards him. Spellbound. To the man in the centre of the room - beautiful, and even more so in stark black and white. Dangerous, lethal, and magnetic...

Close, and closer. Sebastian's hands itched with the desire to touch, but, as if his thoughts were written across his forehead, a voice, smooth, cool and treacherous as silk, reminded him... of the rules.

Then Moriarty turned and opened one of the drawers...

Yes, Sebastian had expected something like this, but in the face of it...

There was a sudden surge of... well, it should have been panic, and maybe there was a thread of that too, but it was much too complex to put a name on it.

The sight of the restraints, the harsh sound of the chain hitting the floor as intense as a physical impact - the startlingly violent counterpoint to a satiny, near entrancing voice.

He realised a question was asked that required an answer. He also realised that he'd reached a point where, regardless what that question was, only one answer was possible.

“Yes.”

Sane or safe this was not, but it was consensual.

Any residues of common sense, instinct or whatever, tried to scream an objection, and were drowned out... their last gasp probably snuffed by oxygen depletion, as most of his blood seemed to rush towards the hand on his chest, and along the path it was dragging... downwards.
As he slowly put his hands out in front of him, his eyes were on Moriarty's, and there they stayed. Stayed still, while he felt the leather cuffs being fastened around his wrists.

Taking the option to use his hands – to touch, caress, resist… to fight for his life - off the table.

And he allowed it.

~

When Jim fastened the buckles on the wrist cuffs, he felt a wild triumph surge through him.

He had assessed all the possible outcomes and given Sebastian's psychological profile, it seemed highly unlikely that he would leave. But the chance had been there, and it had made Jim feel strangely unsettled... restless....

He wanted to go loping through the deep dark woods and lose himself completely -
growling from behind the trees...

eyes glittering in the darkness...

singing hungrily to the moon...

But enough of these fanciful notions... Jim had a big, beautiful soldier willing to literally be chained up to be with him.

Jim wrapped the chain around his own wrist and drew Sebastian towards him.

He stood and watched Jim.

Jim yanked him forward and at the same time he stepped towards him. He pulled Sebastian into a crushing kiss for a moment - then he bit his lip and pulled on it gently as he stepped back.

"Mmm... just as good as before, only now - I have you in my clutches, don't I..."

Jim smirked and he slowly circled Sebastian.

He drew closer and plucked at his shirt. "Your clothes aren't going to win you any fashion contests, but you have the hot, dangerous soldier thing down, don't you? And this look really does flatter your body... but do you know what else would flatter your body, Sebastian...?"

He smiled coyly and lifted his hand to the side of his mouth. "No clothing at all," he staged-whispered.

He unhooked the chain from one of the leather cuffs. "The sooner it's all off, the sooner I'll have access to every inch... and the sooner you'll get to feel yourself in my hands..."
He unhooked the chain from the other cuff, and draped it around Sebastian's shoulders. "And I can do magnificent things with these hands..." he purred, stepping back. "Amongst other things... Mmm, I can't wait to show you everything I can do," he chuckled as he walked around to Sebastian's back and slowly pulled the leather jacket off his shoulders. He threw it in the corner and continued on to Sebastian's shirt. As the material lifted off him, Jim slid the chain back over his broad shoulders.

He threw the shirt with the jacket, and ran his tongue over his lips. He couldn't help but stare at his muscular body, transfixed.

He wrapped his arms around his waist, revelling in the warmth of his skin - and moved his hands slowly down to his belt.

He felt himself holding his breath as his hands slid over the buckle, waiting for the satisfying chink as it came unfastened and the ends of the belt hung loosely on each side.

His breath then quickened as he unbuttoned and unzipped Sebastian's trousers.

Jim deeply breathed in his scent by pressing his nose into his back.

He eased Sebastian's trousers down over his hips. "Why don't you take care of the rest, darling... All I want you to be wearing is these cuffs and my chain..." he purred.

~

Yanking his chain – literally – Moriarty seemed intent on keeping him just that tiny bit off balance in various ways. The fierce kiss he pulled him into, ending with a bite, had Sebastian catching his breath. He let it out as a small amused huff through his nose, at the assessment of his clothing - which sounded totally fine to him.

"Well, fashion awards are not usually what I'm after..."

With the chain momentarily detached from the cuffs, they didn't feel as alien any more. After evoking a slight uneasiness at first, the thick leather had warmed to his skin and seemed to have settled around his wrists as if it ... belonged there.

Sebastian's eyes didn't follow Moriarty's path, circling him and then stopping behind his back. The jacket was removed from his shoulders, and without thinking Sebastian raised his arms as the T-shirt followed. The slight daze he'd been in so far was nothing compared to what he felt as the man behind him stepped even closer – a presence, palpably radiating heat and desire. Warm breath, then his face between his shoulder blades, like a predator nuzzling a delicious meal he'd just brought down, before sinking his teeth into it... It nearly made Sebastian jump, and had him craving to lean back into the touch at the same time. So, caught between the two, he kept still, just closing his eyes, and relishing the dizzying sensation of feeling these hands and arms, for the first time, on his bare skin...

The sound of that voice, the chink of a belt buckle being opened... Fuck -
For a few more seconds he didn't move at all, trying to get the simple steps of taking off the rest of his clothes into a manageable order. Boots, socks, jeans, boxer briefs. Right.

There was nothing coy or teasing about the way he stripped, but no nervousness either. No visible unease, even doing it in front of someone watching with gleaming eyes, while staying fully clothed himself...

He was used to all sorts of reactions (although the majority of his flings weren’t even treated to – or had to deal with – the view). Some degree of awkwardness or even disquiet was the most common.

Sebastian's body gave a whole new meaning to the concept of *scrap-booking* your life's memories. He carried his with him. Like a map to everything he was and ever had been, a testament to shrapnel, gunshot and knife wounds. Burning desert sun had left the ghosts of tan lines that never completely faded. But the most horrific entry was the deep furrowed scar across his left shoulder and all down his side. From something that had torn skin and chest and abdominal muscles, even laying bare ribs in some places...

Hell, it *was* a bit unnerving being observed. But his cock, already half hard, was obviously more interested than disconcerted by the proceedings.

Sebastian resisted the impulse to fidget, cross his arms, or whatever else one tended to do under scrutiny. He kept his breathing even, and just raised an eyebrow at the man who was looking at him, taking stock.

“Need me to cough or anything?”

~

Jim regretfully withdrew his hands from flushed, heated skin, so he could stand in front of him as Sebastian stripped off his clothes. God, this was the moment he'd been looking forward to from the moment he'd seen the sniper's photos. It felt like a relief to admit that now, even just to himself...

Yesss, he *wanted* him... how the fuck could he *not*?

Jim watched...

As boots and socks came off…

And then there were only jeans...

And then there were only pants... (boxer briefs – beautiful choice, darling!)

And Jim's breath caught in his throat as his cock came into view.

*Oh*...

*Hello*, gorgeous...

Jim had to tear his eyes away to scan the rest of his body...
Sebastian Moran was simply the most majestic, beautiful man he'd ever seen naked...

He was just about to ask about the wicked scar that covered so much of his torso... when Sebastian stared him down and made the rather pointed inquiry about coughing.

Oh, you little shit...

"No, I need you as you were, soldier - wrists out, Moran," he snapped.

With pleasure, he saw something soldierly come over Sebastian, seemingly involuntarily. His posture stiffened, his shoulders moved back... and his wrists floated into position. Jim stifled a delighted smile. Oh, this was going to be fun...

Once again, he attached the leather cuffs to the chain. He did this expertly, staring at Sebastian with a piercing gaze.

Once again, he wrapped the chain around his own wrist.

Then he pulled Sebastian towards him, and took his jaw in his hand.

"Not that I don't enjoy your impertinent mouth, darling... but next time, know that there will be consequences."

Jim squeezed his jaw firmly. "And I like delivering consequences. Consequences are fun. You may come to enjoy them, too - since you obviously have a taste for the intensity life has to offer. But the one thing you won't ever do is forget them..."

Jim pressed his lips to Sebastian's fiercely, and nipped his bottom lip as he pulled away. Then he pulled the chain and led him to a wooden apparatus. He proceeded to attach the cuffs to a wooden beam above his head in such a way that Sebastian's arms were spread wide.

"Now... Tell me how you received those gorgeous scars and don't leave out any details..."

Jim looked at the scars on his left side in overt fascination, and ran his hands over them, feather-soft. Then he moved his tongue over them slowly and sinuously.

"Apex predator?" he murmured. "Wanted to make a meal out of you? I can understand how he felt..."
It was an automatism, this military response to an order - resurfacing as Sebastian's conscious self seemed to have taken a step back - something that never completely vanished once the army had written it into your bones.

It was a mechanism that wasn't easy to trigger, not where Sebastian Moran was concerned - but there was something in these dark, piercing eyes that did it … effortlessly.

Moriarty's splayed fingers lightly grazing the scars were strangely almost tenderly evoking the memories of nearly being eviscerated by a wild beast. Heart pounding and hands shackled above his head, Sebastian knew that handing himself over to this man like he had, might be asking for… exactly that.

He swallowed, his mouth a bit dry, aware that returning to that particular place of his past might throw him into a flashback if he didn't tread carefully...

Out of an eight-man patrol, three had survived – a Fubar mission if ever there'd been one. And Sebastian Moran had come back from it with more than just the visible scars, and with a deep loathing for 'bad intel' and superiors who didn't know what they were doing... The whole story was probably a bit too long for pillow talk - especially with no pillows in sight – but he could still boil it down to the bit featuring the tiger.

“We sort of... stumbled across each other...”

Literally. And with a wounded tiger charging at you from twenty paces away, you could only hope that the time to stop it with a 9mm handgun was shorter than the two seconds it took the beast to cover the distance.

It wasn't.

The tiger had died, and Sebastian nearly with it.

“They say the last recorded sighting of a Caspian tiger happened somewhere in the mountains near the Afghan-Tajik border,” he concluded the story, “in 1998. Place sounds about right. But it was 2001.” Just weeks after 9/11 when the SAS had sent the first recon patrols into northern Afghanistan.

~

Jim watched Sebastian closely as he spoke and continued to stroke his skin. He caught the hard swallow, the haunted look in his eye. There was something going on with the man...You don't go through something that leaves these kinds of scars without having some kind of trauma to work through. Jim understood this all too well, although his vicious scars were all well beneath the skin...

At the thought, Jim felt a tremor move through his muscles, and gritted his teeth.

Get it together, Jimmy...
He breathed in and out to allow the feeling to dissipate...

*Slow... steady... that's it...*

Back to Sebastian... he still looked a bit haunted, but less so than before.

"So, you survived an attack by a predatory cat... and took him down before he could tear you to ribbons..." Jim tilted his head, looking up at him. "Quite the bedtime story, Sebastian... I'm impressed," Jim lowered his voice to a seductive murmur. He moved his head closer and spoke close to his ear. "Very promising, darling..."

Jim felt momentarily stunned - he had no idea he was going to say that, and he wasn't quite sure what he'd meant by it. As in, promising that Sebastian would survive another encounter with a predator? That worked... but he couldn't help but shake the feeling there was more to it. He just hoped that this wasn't apparent to the man he had chained up in his dungeon.

Fuck this... it was time to begin.

Jim slowly moved his hands down Sebastian's muscular chest, devouring him with his gaze... moving them slowly down his abdomen, his pelvis, and his thighs... then up again more quickly, this time digging in his fingernails.

Jim relished the gasp from Sebastian's lips and looked at the red groove marks he'd left in his skin.

He moved his lips to the scratch marks on his chest and looked up at Sebastian as he pressed his lips to the skin. He saw small beads of blood breaking through the skin, and he tongued them gently.

"I'm very glad you can hold your own against dangerous creatures, Sebastian..." Jim said gazing at him.

He lowered his hands down the same path, pressing hard against the scratches he'd left, and this time moving up to his cock, which Jim was delighted to find was already rock hard. He pressed his groin against it and moved up and down.

"See? You're already *holding your own* against the most dangerous creature you've ever met... the tiger was a *warm-up*, darling."

He moved his hands up and down his length, and continued to look him in the eyes until he kissed him hard on the lips. He didn't usually do a lot of kissing... or *any*, really. But there was something about Sebastian that made him willing to relax this little rule of his, and he slipped his tongue into his mouth.
Moriarty's voice dropped to a *purr*, sounding pleased about the story, and maybe even more so about having found someone who'd survive a few scratches? His whispered compliment also seemed to hold… reassurance. Which – in quite a fucked up way – actually worked. Because, even more fucked up: this was what Sebastian had wanted. What had *drawn* him. What had shocked him, when he'd realised, he *wanted* these hands on him, from the moment that man had first turned his attention to him. And he wanted it so much, that he didn't care *what* they'd do to him.

Now they left trails of heat along his body, and Sebastian drew a sharp breath, as suddenly they intertwined with lines of bright, clear pain… blurred and highlighted where a tongue flicked across them. As intoxicating and arousing as was the realisation that he was completely at this man's mercy. In an instinctive reaction and with a deep groan Sebastian pressed back into the hand now closing around his cock. The dark eyes holding his gaze sent him reeling again - into the sensation of tripping and falling. He responded to the kiss fiercely, tasting the salty-sweet hint of blood – his own – on the tongue sliding against his.

To be denied doing more, as a pull against the cuffs reminded him, was quite frustrating… but also, thrilling beyond measure.

~

As Jim kissed Sebastian, he heard the sound of leather straining above their heads...

As his tongue moved against Sebastian’s, he *felt* the man pulling against his bonds.

And it reminded him... if the dear soldier wasn't in restraints, christ knows what would be happening now... but it would be far more challenging to keep control while Jim was still establishing their dynamic. This was a critical time, and it wouldn't do to be lax.

So regretfully he broke off from the kiss, but not before he wondered what it would be like to feel Sebastian’s formidable strength... but, no. *Not yet.*

Not until the soldier was firmly in hand...

Speaking of firmly in hand... Sebastian was starting to moan as Jim's hand stroked him.

Jim pulled his hand off his cock just a moment after pulling away from the kiss.

"Oh, sweetheart... you don't want the fun to be over so *quickly*, do you?"

He licked upwards over Sebastian's lips, and hovered in front of him, grinning.

"The night is just beginning... let's take the scenic route, shall we?"
He touched Sebastian's face, then sauntered over to the gleaming black cabinet.

He ran his fingers over the leather implements in of the drawers, made his selection and returned to Sebastian, hand behind his back.

"Do you know the moment when pain becomes pleasure, Sebastian?" he asked with an innocent smile. "All those tricky little endorphins making you feel something that wasn't there a moment before? What if you've only felt a fraction of how good it can feel... and all you need to do, my dear, is brave the pain to feel the most delicious pleasure... Mmmm... Sebastian... I look forward to seeing your response to all that sweet, sweet pain and pleasure... " Jim murmured, splaying his fingers against Sebastian's cheek, while the other hand pinched and caressed his nipple. "But there's just one more thing we'll need for the ultimate pleasure... and that's your surrender, darling. I look forward to seeing your face in that moment... Sebastian..." Jim whispered, kissed his lips for a brief, hungry moment, and then stepped back.

~

Sebastian made a small noise of discontent - when the kiss ended, and the hand left his cock.

Because, as Jim pointed out, they didn't want it to be over so quickly.

Eyes half-closed, he gave the tiniest smirk.

“Believe me, it wouldn't... “

Especially after that dry spell he'd been put through... surely Jim remembered? People drugged, clubs blown up...?

But without question he'd already accepted it was Jim calling the shots here.

And even if Sebastian wasn't entirely unfamiliar with the terrain they'd entered, it dawned on him that... yes, anything he'd ever experienced had just been a fraction of what it could be.

“I might have dabbled,” he muttered.

No more than that. Never more than that. Because ultimately, it required something that Sebastian Moran didn't give lightly, and not to just anyone.

More precisely, to no one. Because he'd never met anyone who'd deserved it. Deserved it because they had the strength and the charisma, the boldness, ferocity, the sheer power to claim it.
Someone who could make him surrender.

His eyes had closed. Jim's hands now back on his skin, that soft, suggestive voice, and the words it uttered, wreaked havoc on his senses as well as his body and mind - quickening his pulse, slowing his thoughts...

Suddenly, with a quick kiss, Jim drew back and Sebastian had to stifle a noise that would have been… downright undignified. Pleading for something, anything, ... any contact to be returned...

~

Jim saw the look in Sebastian's eyes as he stepped away, and knew it was just a matter of time - his soldier wanted to submit, needed to submit, but of course there was the little matter of pride and ego, and all the defenses and resistance he would throw at Jim until it was done. Jim wasn't daunted by the amount of time and energy it would take... he had cleared his schedule, and Sebastian's for tomorrow, although he hadn't informed him of this little fact yet. With what he'd be experiencing tonight, Sebastian would be useless as a bodyguard, mentally as well as physically... and Jim didn't relish the thought of having to keep his wits about him tomorrow, either.

As Jim stepped away from Sebastian, he also felt an unfamiliar sensation spreading through him - fascination. It had an intoxicating effect on him, like he'd been gulping down mouthfuls of red wine. It was one thing to feel fascinated by quarry while on the hunt, but now that he had him in his grasp, it only seemed to increase. What sounds would Sebastian make? What expressions would cross his face? How long would it take him to submit... and in the journey to submission, would he curse? Would he rage? Would he cry?

Who was Sebastian Moran at the end of the world that he knew?

Jim longed for the answers to these questions with a hunger he'd never experienced before.

And finally, it dawned on him - this was never just about a conquest of wills like it had been with the rest...

Because at the end of collecting each and every one these answers, at the end of the journey to inevitable surrender, Sebastian Moran would be his.

Jim took a deep breath as he contemplated the large man in front of him, who was staring at him with raw desire, raw longing, in his eyes...

Slowly he drew out the flicker whip from behind his back.

"Sebastian... welcome to the deep dark woods."

Jim slowly began to circle around Sebastian.

Rounding his side, Jim dragged the crop along his ribs, the tassels at the top stroking his skin.
"For the duration of your stay, you will continue to address me as Sir. I don't believe that will present any problems to a former soldier?"

At his back, he continued to drag the crop.

"As I mentioned, there will be consequences for behaviour I don't care for ..."

He drew back the crop and smacked it hard against the skin below Sebastian's right shoulder blade. He heard a sharp intake of breath from Sebastian and saw him jerking forward slightly, but no other reaction. Jim smiled.

"And there will be pain... but if you desire more, by all means, let's hear from your impertinent mouth..." he said in a silky voice, and continued around to his left side.

"There are no safewords here... but if you wanted to feel cozy and warm, you would have stayed on the path...isn’t that so…"

Jim tsked at Sebastian as he returned to his line of vision. He could feel his eyes gleaming.

"I for one am pleased you strayed so far... but then... the wolf is hardly the hero of the tale..."

Jim grinned fiercely at Sebastian and ducked underneath his arm.

He snaked a hand around Sebastian's hip, brought down over his balls and then up over his cock. Jim tucked his face against his ribs and looked up at him mischievously.

"You put yourself into my hands and I'm dying to see who you really are, Sebastian... how long will it take you to show me?"

He winked and disappeared behind him. Jim's hand cupped Sebastian's balls and he raised his other arm with the flicker whip. He brought it down hard over his arse and closed his eyes with pleasure at the sharp sound.
Jim had stepped back, looking at him.

And maybe it was then that it hit home – finally - that this wasn't a game. Or at least none where you just got up from the table when it was finished, and left the room as the same man who'd sat down to play.

It wasn't even the whip that came into view now, but those eyes. Locked onto him, *incandescent* with desire… with a naked hunger as he'd never encountered before. They seemed capable of tearing him into neat, bite-sized little pieces without the man even touching him.

He'd never seen anything so utterly, eerily... beautiful.

He didn't look away. *Couldn't.*

Instead, he raised his chin ever so slightly.

*Then let's see what you can do.*

The whip trailed lightly along his ribs, up his back.

Rules of engagement – any problems there?

“*No -- Sir.*”

Damn. He'd have to watch that, but after a while he'd just slip back into what was, after all, familiar patterns of behavio – a sharp crack, a short zing of pain, more startling than anything else, took him by surprise. *Ffft* - Consequences. Noted.

And no safewords. Right. In the world he came from, there weren't any, either.

Jim had completed his circle, grinning up at him mischievously. He was running a hand lightly over his cock, and his words were even more teasing. Sebastian realized that although he had a pretty good idea about the game-not-really-a-game, he hadn't the faintest notion of where it would end. He knew what the man he wanted, wanted from him... no, wrong, what he matter-of-factly presumed he'd get from him, *everything else just being a matter of how long it would take.*

Well, if Jim really thought he could just whip Sebastian Moran into a grovelling puddle of submission, ready to be mopped up from the floor, then... they were in for a very long night.

The moment it appeared, that sudden spark of defiance was engulfed in another, sharper lick of pain.

Sebastian hardly flinched. Remarkable how someone having you literally by the balls, had you watch very closely what you were doing. Then again, other involuntary physical reactions were completely out of his control.

And probably not a single one of them would escape Jim, breathing down his neck as he was.

In this moment, Sebastian sensed him with every fibre of his being. Because he already *had* given Jim something of what he was looking for. He was here - drawn in, fascinated, *seduced* maybe… but *here* was exactly the place he *wanted* to be, of his own free will. Prepared to take anything Jim would do to him… *could* do with him.

And they both were about to find out what that was.
Jim thought lovingly of the defiance he had seen flash through Sebastian's eyes. Oh, breaking through it was going to be delicious... it wouldn't be easy, but what the fuck did Jim want with easy? That's what the morons of the past had brought to the table - they crumbled like wet plaster, and thought to please him with their whining? Jim's lip curled at the thought, then he banished the thought.

Not here.

Here in the hushed silence of the dark room lit by candles, in the presence of a naked man with outstretched arms, Jim could almost believe himself in a church - only it was not a place of hypocrisy and lies, as he'd found in the Catholic church of his childhood. This was a place of truth - and uncovering still greater levels of truth...

Jim had seen the truth of Sebastian Moran, but now he was ready for a deeper, truer level of Sebastian Moran...

"You may be wondering about the end game," Jim said conversationally. "Well, let me tell you..."

He lashed the other cheek of his arse, and then slipped the crop under his arm so as to grip both cheeks.

"Mmm... beautiful arse, darling... " Jim fondled his cheeks and pressed his chin into Sebastian's side. "Would you like me to fuck your arse, Sebastian? It will be the best you’ve ever had – and that's not ego talking; it's a promise. And I imagine that's why you came here... braving all the uncertainty, all the potential risk to your work and your life... all to have a shot at having my cock inside you? It’s well worth the risk, darling...” Jim smiled slyly and licked his lips.

Jim then moved his tongue along Sebastian’s ribs, along his pectoral muscle and down to his left nipple. He swirled his tongue around it, then gently took it in his teeth and pulled. He looked up at Sebastian who was watching with desire and fascination, and he let go.

He gave him a curt smile. "Well, nothing comes easy in this room. Take that exactly as it sounds. There are no guarantees, and no easy rides. I would love to fuck you, Sebastian - but even I have to play by these rules. Nobody fucks anybody without certain criteria being met. And in this case, the requirement is quite simple - I just need a 'please'." Jim's smile was ferocious now. "Please, Sir. It can't be perfunctory, and it certainly can't be sarcastic... sorry, darling. You have to mean it.... and I mean, mean it with every cell of your being. Believe me, Sebastian - I will know if you don't, and it will make me very cross."
He swiped the crop hard across Sebastian's left thigh.

"Oooh! That was a lovely one," Jim grinned, and did the same to the other thigh. "Symmetry is a beautiful thing, isn't it..."

He regarded the red horizontal marks that were forming on Sebastian's powerful thighs.

"Beautiful..." he echoed, and touched the lines with his hands.

"Now... I've had plenty to say and you've been fairly quiet. You're welcome to speak, just remember - consequences. Do you have any thoughts on the rules? Any blustering or manly protests, 'You'll hear a please from me over your dead body'... that kind of thing?" Jim laughed out loud and grinned at Sebastian.

"Go on..." he purred. "I want to hear it..."

~

The shock of another hard swipe of the whip was enhanced by the hands grabbing his arse, pressing against the stripes of stinging heat. Sebastian swallowed, his mind floundering and then being jerked back into sharp focus. To admit that, from the very beginning, it had been those hands you'd fantasized about, was one thing. To own up to the fact that you simply wanted to get fucked by the man, in every conceivable position, was... well, it wasn't really *that* difficult anymore. Not in the state Sebastian was now, as the question was put to him so blatantly.

There was just a short flash of feeling a bit caught out, but much more so the telltale rush of anticipation that went straight to his cock.

Eyelids fluttering, his head tilted back a little.

“Might have crossed my mind...” he muttered.

And being informed by the little braggart of how *good* he was didn't exactly help, thank you very much. Sebastian bit back a groan. Thing was, he *believed* him, as it was simply impossible to imagine Jim Moriarty *not* being good at... anything, really. Except some of the lesser arts, maybe. Things that didn't really matter much, like pottery and origami...

But good gracious, the man could talk the hind legs off a donkey. And effortlessly so, while all your synapses were occupied keeping up with everything *else* he was doing. Teeth, tongue, hands, words - all these created a turmoil of shivering anticipation, arousal and... yes, apprehension that threatened yet again to turn Sebastian's mind utterly blank.
But there were criteria to digest. One condition - just two tiny little words. Two mere syllables. Easy as pie. And as difficult as anything for the man who'd said them countless times in his life, probably without ever meaning them once.

And if anyone could see through that, it was the man now punctuating what he'd just said with two more blows of the whip. Relishing, with a wild smile, the fact he'd made Sebastian really flinch for the first time - not just a reaction to the blistering pain but rather the proximity to more delicate parts of his body.

He wasn't sure if he could share Jim's appreciation for symmetry quite to the same extent. But yes, maybe it did have something to do with what they were both immersed in here. Because this wasn't about merely breaking something.

Much more profoundly, it was also about establishing something.

Sebastian slowly got back his bearings, after the onslaught of the whip and all those rules and conditions. Did he have anything to say to it? Any blustering, or manly protests?

“...like blustering about how good a lay I am?”

He spoke cautiously, but there was a glint in his eyes and his lips twitched ever so slightly.

“Like... how getting fucked by me is simply worth anything?” He shrugged his shoulders best he could, not least to help circulation.

“Well, it is.” His eyes had the insolence to travel the length of Jim's body, coming to rest on the hand that held the whip.

“So... if you find your arm getting tired, you're welcome to consider a switch. You wouldn't even have to beg.”

~

Jim found himself laughing before he could keep it from escaping his lips. He was expecting a certain level of snark from his soldier - bloody hell, he was looking forward to it... Not only it would be amusing, but then he'd get to punish him - which would hopefully move things along. Win, win for all the players - especially those with the name Moriarty.

Even still, he was not prepared for the sheer audacity of the man - the arrogant words, the body language (even in chains!), and the smug fucking look on Sebastian's face.

Jayysus... and people thought Jim was an arrogant prick...

Well, OK. He most definitely was... but it looked like now he had some competition...

Sebastian was watching him closely, a smile playing on his lips.

Hmm... how to handle this little insurrection...

Jim stepped closer, grinning wildly.
"Hmm... is my arm getting tired?" he said with mock concern. "Awfully considerate of you to ask..."

He back-handed Sebastian across the face and considered his arm.

"Nah, feels great... Don't worry about the arm."

Jim observed with satisfaction the blood trickling from Sebastian's lip. "Ohh, let me get that..." he licked languorously at the blood.

"You are delicious, Sebastian... I have no doubt that you're a remarkable lay. And that getting fucked by you is a gift worth your weight in gold. But at this point... the only begging that's on the table is yours... darling. Can you give me an ETA on that 'please', just so I have an idea?"

Jim leaned in and kissed him hungrily, and once again had to pull himself away before it became a full make-out session with his prisoner.

~

Holy shit, Jim was fast, you had to give him that. And even if Sebastian had seen this coming a bit earlier - there wasn't much he could have done about it one way or the other. The blow connected viciously, whipping his head to the side, leaving him stunned and bringing a shocking rush of adrenaline.

“Right, arm's fine,” he mumbled after collecting himself for a second or two, “copy that.” The words sounded slightly blurry while he was taking inventory of any damage, and Jim’s tongue was lapping up the few drops of blood. Sebastian still caught the glimmer of amusement in his eyes while dutifully listening to the – not quite but almost tender – scolding.

This was followed by a heated kiss, a small flare of pain in his lip spicing it up even more.

“ETA for the 'please'?" Sebastian looked down as if pondering this, while the tip of his tongue prodded lightly against the small cut in his still-bleeding lip. “Hm, not sure... so barely out of the gates as we are? Why?“ he asked, “Gotta be somewhere?”

~

He was incorrigible...something had to be done.

As much as he was enjoying Sebastian's mouthiness, they were going to get nowhere if they ended up snarking and bantering all night.
"Hmm... there is somewhere I'd like to be, Sebastian - but it's not time yet. And we only have until the end of the night to get there..." Jim gave him a pointed look over his shoulder as he passed by. He returned to the cabinet and opened up the velvet-lined drawer.

Time to ramp things up...

Jim slid a sheathed knife into the back of his waistband, and walked back holding a rattan cane in his hand.

"What was that thing we talked about, do you recall?" Jim asked, scratching his head. "Begins with a 'c', and has to do with the result of an action...?" Jim snapped his fingers. "Consequences!" he shouted with exaggerated relief. Then his eyes flashed and he swung the cane against Sebastian's left thigh, causing a loud gasp.

"Oh, that was going to drive me mad!" The cane lashed down on the right thigh, and another gasp ensued.

Jim's brow furrowed. "Now that sounded painful, Sebastian... but it left the prettiest marks... maybe I should mark the other side, too?"

He moved around Sebastian and administered lash after lash against his arse. By the time he was done, Sebastian's breathing was loud and ragged.

"I wish you could see the pattern... it's fucking beautiful, darling..." Jim said in husky voice. "By the time I'm through with you, you're going to look like a bloody tiger."

He popped in front of Sebastian, and gave him a heated look. "Going to make me work for it, aren't you? I'll make you bleed for that. But first... I think you need a taste of what you're denying yourself, honey..."

He gazed down the length of Sebastian's body, and pulled off his shirt. He threw it in the corner of the room, and his undershirt followed. He slid his bare chest up and down against Sebastian's, dark eyes locked on blue ones. He licked his lips provocatively, and slid down the length of Sebastian's body slowly until he was on his knees. Jim's hands grasped his arse, and his lips sought out Sebastian's cock. He looked up piercingly as he began to suck.
Sebastian's act of still being largely unaffected (he wasn't, and in no way had been since the beginning) – was slipping.

The disgrace of being caned like some… Victorian first-grader just added insult to injury, and fuck, it did hurt. There was nothing of child's play in the way the implement in Jim's hand relentlessly dealt out a deeper, more vicious pain than the whip. And no, Sebastian couldn't see the pattern of welts Jim was creating, but he felt every single one. The already protesting muscles of his shoulders and arms were hard and tense under his stubborn determination to just… take this. Then suddenly it stopped.

Nearly weak-kneed from the chemicals flooding in after pain, Sebastian realised he'd closed his eyes against the infuriating prickle of involuntary tears. Blinking briefly, he forced them open again, just when Jim reappeared in his still slightly blurry field of vision. A wee bit put out that he really had to work for this?!

You bet, Sebastian's eyes stared back, as he breathed harshly. Although, for the first time, there wasn't any snarky retort. He felt a bit dizzy, watching Jim as he pulled off his shirt and then stood in front of him, chest bare. Lean, mean, beautiful little bastard - shadow and light licking over the pale, near unmarred skin of chest and shoulders... Dizziness started to feel like fainting when Jim stepped closer, pressing, sliding against him, and then, moving down to the floor.

The intensely contradictory sensations of hands on his arse, digging painfully into welts and bruises, and a mouth taking in his cock, merged into something so exquisite and mindblowing, that Sebastian's thoughts ground to a halt. Slipped into standby. Useless. Only some last lines of communication still relayed the order to fucking not move, because... because. Period.

Sheer sensory overload had his eyes close and his head tip back, and when his ability to breathe returned, it did so with a low, drawn-out moan.

~

Jim nearly grinned at the look on Sebastian's face when he first dropped to the floor.

Didn't expect that did you, honey? he thought, feeling his eyes gleaming. Your boss on his knees giving you a spec-fucking-tacular blow job? You may suspect what I'm playing at, but I guarantee you've never seen anything like this... so hold on to your hat, darling... we're heading for the big finish, but we have a few stops to make... and they're going to be a scream...

Jim took a moment to enjoy the sensation - after all, he had a gorgeously hot specimen of manhood strung up in his dungeon, and his cock was a thing of fucking beauty. Jim made a pleased, purring noise low in his throat, and this had Sebastian leaning his head back and moaning.

And that was Jim's cue to - just - stop. He rose from the floor weightlessly like a preternatural being and appeared suddenly in front of Sebastian's face. His hand stroked down hard on Sebastian's cock and then stayed still.

"Do you want me to keep going?" he purred and looked at him through half-closed eyes. "You know what I want, Honey..."
The low purr from the throat around his cock threatened to short-circuit every available nerve-ending. Heat started pooling at the bottom of his spine - suddenly the slick, teasing pressure of Jim's tongue disappeared, replaced by the hard grip of his hand sliding down to the base of his cock. Sebastian swallowed and barely managed to prevent his moan from becoming a whine.

As his eyes opened, he looked straight into Jim’s gleefully smiling face. The little shit!

'You know what I want, Honey...'

It was about the only thing Honey remembered right now. And he was on the brink of begging.

How hard could it be?

Harder, as it turned out, than to strain forward, using the little wriggle room he had. Which, with Jim being so close, was enough to catch his mouth with a fierce, nipping kiss - Sebastian was sure the blood he tasted wasn't his own.

~

Jim's initial impulse was to jerk away and punch his smirking mouth, but - that's probably what Sebastian expected.

And he was not about to give him the satisfaction.

So instead he kissed back aggressively, biting his split lip, so they were both bleeding.

He pulled back with a mad smile, and touched his finger through the wetness he felt trickling from his lip. Then he slowly ran his tongue up his finger.

"Jesus," he breathed. "Not enough... not nearly enough..."

He pulled the knife out from his trousers, threw the sheath onto a nearby table with a thump.

Sebastian grew alert and tense. Jim rolled his eyes.

"Relax, Sebastian... this isn't my killing blade. It's purely for pleasure. Important to keep the two distinct, you know - the blades have different desires. And this blade longs for a taste of your blood, not to get acquainted with your throat from the inside..."

Jim smiled brightly at him and stepped forward again. He dragged the knife underneath Sebastian's
right clavicle. He drank in first the sound of Sebastian sucking in his breath, and then the luscious droplets of blood threatening to spill down over his chest.

"And anyway," he continued. "Why would I want to kill you when I just got you, and you're so delightful to play with? And you're going to give me a big, beautiful please by the end of the night... I can practically hear it now... Please, Sir," he murmured, dragging the knife along his left clavicle and watching with fascination as the drops of blood rolled down.

He slowly and languorously licked the blood from Sebastian’s chest. "Please," Jim whispered with half-closed eyes.
Feel What It Is To Be Mine

It was like two wild beasts tearing into each other after circling and circling - just a short bout, but with bits of fur flying and blood being drawn. Jim returned the courtesy, and with interest. Sebastian didn't know what he'd been expecting, surely a response of delicious aggression, but probably of an entirely different nature...

There was a glowing satisfaction in Sebastian's eyes taking in the blood on that exquisite, sensuous mouth, and the languorous way a finger was dipped into it. Then his already racing pulse tripped and skyrocketed when Jim stepped back and unsheathed a knife.

And then… a strange sensation, like a fusion of sheer panic and... profound serenity. As if he'd always known that tonight his life would either end or... begin.

The tip of the knife, lightly drawn along his collar bone was so razor sharp, that at first it felt like a tender caress, only later followed by a silvery thread of pain, the warmth of blood welling up, the tongue licking it away, and the whispered words so seductive he nearly went into a trance...

~

Jim looked up, saw how dazed and unfocused Sebastian’s eyes were looking...

The knife was the right choice.

He dragged the blade lightly down Sebastian's chest, not quite hard enough to cut, but enough to hear the delicious scraping sound of steel against flesh. The knife continued down Jim's scratch marks, along his abdomen and then down his right hip and thigh. When he swept back up, the knife nicked the tender flesh over his hip. Jim's mouth formed an 'O' of mock surprise, then the knife swept down over his left hip and did the same. Jim looked down with fascination at the small cuts and the blood that trickled out. He touched his finger to the small cut, and pressed it to his lips.

"I'm so glad we're doing this, darling..." Jim said, his eyes locking onto Sebastian's. "It did have an air of... inevitability, didn't it? Like if it didn't happen, there would be some dreadful chemical combustion? Only thing is.... I'm not sure a combustion won't occur anyway now that we're here...." he breathed. "Here in this dark little room... just you and me, on the edge of a knife." He smiled with a flash of teeth, and ducked under his arm.

~

Yes, it had felt inevitable from... Sebastian's mind was currently in no state to remember when, but maybe... from the very beginning. One memory came back that drew an amused little huff from him.
“Right,” he muttered, “and your little luxury-grade woodshed here might go up in flames...”

He remembered his snarky text to Jim the other day, after the Russian incident – how Jim wouldn’t know what a woodshed even looked like. Now he’d have to take that back...

The hypnotic graze of the knife was interspersed with small flares of pain, seemingly random – some so quick and light Sebastian hardly felt them, others sharper, or unerringly finding such sensitive spots, they made his whole body flinch. It was like a network of heated wires snaking around him, and there was no way of anticipating which one would zap and which would not. At some stage he must have zoned out, and it was a sharp blow of a whip that jerked his consciousness back, before Jim's hand on his cock tilted everything upside down again...

When something was about to drown out arousal and everything else in the mix, Sebastian wasn't even able to pinpoint it, just that it was pushing him past discomfort into sheer pain. He tried to somehow ease the strain on his arms and shoulders, which was difficult, but the scariest part was that he couldn't really open and close his hands.

Then Jim stretched up in front of him, and with a metallic clink above his head, Sebastian felt his arms being freed, first his left, then his right. He wasn't even able to move them, they just fell down to his sides.

He nearly doubled over, then caught himself, breathing heavily, bowing his head, and gingerly stretching the cramped muscles in his neck. The mild case of blue balls he was developing was a minor inconvenience. He braced himself for the pins and needles of circulation returning to his hands. It started off with just a few sparks, but seconds later the sensation roared up with such agonising intensity it nearly brought him to his knees.

Jim nodded over to the low table, where, amongst other things, like the cane and the knife, Sebastian also saw a bottle of water. He took his sweet time, walking over and stretching his legs. When he had regained enough control over his hands and fingers to grasp the bottle without dropping it, he picked it up, opened it and took several big gulps. God, it was pure bliss.

There was no nervousness, no playing for time, but something nearly stoic about him. Like a boxer between rounds, who'd stepped into his corner of the ring to tend to whatever injury he'd received, yet was already, calmly, refocussing body and mind for the next round. Because the guy who rang the bell wouldn't ask whether he was ready or not.

As he stood there and drank, he could practically feel Jim's eyes on him, and this was more than enough for sexual tension, which had also taken a little break, to creep back in.
Jim observed as Sebastian stretched out his arms and shoulders and then guzzled water like he'd just stumbled out of a desert.

A few thoughts passed through Jim's mind as he watched him stretch.

1) Sebastian was a determined fucker... As much as he wanted Jim and what he was offering him... he was not going to give up his surrender easily. He was going to fight Jim every step of the way.

2) Sebastian could handle a lot - of discomfort, pain and especially mental anguish. There wasn't a blessed soul Jim had ever met who could have taken so much, already... and they weren't even done yet! Jesus, how long had it been now... an hour and half??

3) Jim was actually feeling the strain of keeping this up. He needed this break as much as Sebastian had.

Jim sat on the edge of the bed, and kicked off his boots and socks. Down to only black trousers, he leaned his arms on his thighs and let his head hang down for a moment. Then he swiped a bottle of water from the table - he unscrewed the lid and drank some of it. Then he considered the water for a moment - and poured the remainder of over his head and chest. He shook out his hair and wiped the wetness back from his face. Then he grinned and stood up.

"Round two..." he said, his voice a little hoarse. "Kneel at the foot the bed."

Sebastian stared at him for a moment and then did as he was bid.

Jim pulled out restraints from underneath the mattress, and attached Sebastian's wrists to the wooden posts at the foot of the bed.

Then he poured another bottle of water all over Sebastian... and ran his fingers through his now-wet hair... and pressed himself against Sebastian's now-wet back, rubbing himself up and down in a sensual manner. Then he hopped up on the bed, standing in front of Sebastian.
"Jesus... I'm all wet, now..." he breathed. He unbuttoned the top button, staring at Sebastian like the proverbial wolf... and unzipped his fly.

Then he pulled down his trousers, kicking them across the room. Underneath, he wore white boxer briefs, the same style he'd worn on his first night of stalking his soldier.

Had it only been a few days ago?? And now look at them...

A mere breaking point away from all both of them had desired...

Sebastian could fight him all he liked.

Because in the end, Jim always got what he wanted...

and the man in front of him would be his, come bloody hell or high water.

~

The slight catch in Jim's voice was delicious, as well as the sight of him, grinning, drenched, his hair a pitch-black dripping mess. Yet his instruction to kneel had Sebastian frozen for a beat, torn between something that craved nothing more than to be at the feet of this man, and something snarling you're not fucking serious.

He hovered between the ingrained reflex to obey and honour the rules and bristling indignation and pride… it was only when Sebastian felt the polished floorboards beneath his bent knees and heard the click of the restraints being fastened again, that he realized that his body had vetoed any objections, and had just walked over to the foot of the bed and complied - yearning and deeply grateful for just about any position different from what it had endured for the last ninety minutes or so.

He gasped as Jim unceremoniously upended a bottle above him, the cold water on his feverish skin a shock and a treat at the same time. The low, blissed-out growl Sebastian made turned into a softly uttered profanity at the hellish sting washing over all his freshly sustained cuts. And yet, he couldn't help himself, arching his body against Jim's, who now plastered himself against his back. Jim was moving suggestively, making pain and lust both flare again, and Sebastian found it nearly impossible to even... breathe.

His head dropped and he screwed his eyes shut, without being able to suppress a frustrated noise at the loss of contact when Jim's body slipped away. Only to reappear in front of him on the bed. The way he stripped off his trousers had the air of a cat, putting on a tantalising show on the windowsill,
in front of the nose of the dog in the yard, just outside the reach of his chain.

*Christ,* everything the little fucker did had some theatrical element to it - but *good god,* he had every right, thought Sebastian, drinking in the sight. Every inch was mesmerizing, especially those outlined clearly beneath the designer boxer briefs. A hungry light flickered in Sebastian's eyes and an appreciative smirk spread across his face. It seemed someone else wasn't entirely unaffected by all this.

~

Well, *that* went well, Jim thought, smiling slyly. Sebastian seemed to *really* appreciate how he looked in his pants... and by how his gaze was now focused with laser precision, it seemed he was growing increasingly eager to see what they covered up. Jim’s fingers skimmed his waistband as if to pull them down, but then he smoothed a tiny crease in the fabric with an exaggerated sigh.

He dropped to the bed on his knees and tilted his head level with Sebastian’s. His fingers ran through his wet golden hair slowly, and then tightened and pulled back his head firmly.

“Do you want to be up here on the bed with me, Sebastian? Do you want me to take off *e-e-everythiiing*?” he crooned. “I like how your body feels, my sweet thing. I want to feel mine against yours... with no barriers... just flesh against flesh... and then...” he threw his head back and looked back with a feral smile. “Something I don’t do with most, Sebastian... but you... mmm... I can’t help thinking about how you’ll feel from the inside. Do you want to that too, darling?” His voice had dropped down to breathy murmur. "To feel me inside you?’"

He tongued the base of Sebastian's throat, feeling his pulse... then he slowly licked all the way up his throat and underneath his jaw.

He looked back into his eyes. Sebastian appeared to be poised on that perilous narrow edge between defiance and longing to surrender. Jim shook his head at him with an amused smile and loosened his grip in his hair. "As you like, soldier - round two it is! Around and around we go..." he said in a silky tone, and slipped from the bed.

For Round Two, he would return to the signal whip and leave more of the stripes he'd been so enamoured of seeing on Sebastian's flesh.

The boxer briefs would stay on, even though at this point Jim was dying to peel them off and just plaster himself against Sebastian's body. Everything he'd said to seduce him had the unexpected side effect of infusing Jim with burning desire... ravenous hunger... and deep longing that he didn't know
what the fuck to do with.

He wanted nothing more than to give Sebastian permission to tear the pants off him. He wanted to throw Sebastian to the bed and mount him. He wanted to wrap his naked body against his and fuck him until he lost the power of speech and thought and reason.

He wanted to leave his mark on Sebastian... so no one else would ever satisfy him again.

But he couldn't do any of these things until Sebastian just surrendered himself...

Why wouldn't he just surrender?? Jim thought, panicking for an instant.

Get it the fuck together, Jimmy... he hissed at himself. A muscle in his jaw twitched.

He grabbed his hips and yanked Sebastian's arse back so he was leaning forward onto the posts. Not only was this a very fetching position for his beautiful soldier, but it gave him the added bonus of just enough room to slide his head down in between Sebastian and the bed - should he wish to drive him mad by sucking his cock and stopping repeatedly. (And he did wish, very much.)

Once Sebastian was in position, Jim took his signal whip and his knife and his fingernails and teeth and unleashed his frustration all over his body - leaving blood and sweat and pre-come, which Jim licked off him over and over again, trying not to show his own desperation.

When Sebastian was moaning again and Jim pulled himself off his cock again, he was ready to scream.

He crawled up onto the bed once more, and on his knees, he took Sebastian's face in his hands and exhaled slowly.

"Do - you - want - this?" he whispered intently. "Do you want me, Sebastian?"

~

If anybody knew, it was Sebastian: putting yourself in danger could be as thrilling as sex.

The two brought together – was absolutely breathtaking.

Then throw the most intense physical sensation – pain – into the mix and it was like… no - it didn't
compare to *anything*.

And Jim *was* throwing it at him, in spades. It wasn't just... adding another layer of sensation. It was like... two wildfires merging into a conflagration of apocalyptic dimensions. Melting, blending pleasure and pain into each other, rendering them... indistinguishable, inseparable (maybe permanently so, even after the furnace cooled down again).

So... with meltdown absolutely inevitable, why *didn't* he just surrender?

For one - Sebastian Moran had never once *begged* to be fucked. Usually it was him who did the fucking, and even when it wasn't, he never relinquished control – he was, somehow, still the one *taking* what he wanted, in charge every step of the way.

But there was something else. What happened here tonight... certainly was a sexual encounter of mindblowing proportions, but this was just... the surface. There was something else going on, on a much deeper, primeval, existential level, and he knew it. Knew it just as well as the man now fisting a hand into his hair, pulling his head back, staring into his eyes, searching. Jim's pupils nearly drowned out the remaining fringe of dark brown around them. Sebastian stared back, panting. And then he was flung back into the pit of burning pain and mindnumbing pleasure that left him unable to even ... *remember* the words he was to say, or any other words for that matter...

At some stage, oblivious of the strain in his arms and his chafed wrists, he pulled himself towards the bed, and in blind desperation tried to rut against it, only to be yanked back... and to feel Jim's tongue running over the wetness of his cock, and denying him anything else.

His skin felt flayed, like layers and layers had been peeled back from the very core of his being, and the moan he uttered came from a man at the end of his tether – half curse, half plea.

His eyes opened when he felt Jim's hands and breath on his face, and there wasn't anything left in him to withhold what felt like the only truth remaining.

“... want you,” The words sounded as raw as his throat felt, and he swallowed. “... *please.*”

Jim could see it in Sebastian's eyes. There was a shift happening... a seismic one that would change the very foundation of who Sebastian was.

There had been a concern deep down that Jim didn't want to look at too closely - if he wasn't going to surrender by now after *all* that... was there a chance that he just *wouldn't*?? Jim couldn't fathom that. He wouldn't *allow* it...

Which is why he had stopped with all the pain and teasing and tormenting, and why the two of them
were just staring at each other now. What it all came down to was - did Sebastian want him or not? He knew he did. They both knew he did... but was it enough to break through all that fecking pride and defiance?

As Jim saw his resistance cracking slowly and falling away like rocks crumbling from a cliff, leaving a sheer naked wall... he found himself holding his breath.

Oh... to be staring into his eyes in this moment...

To see the moment of surrender...

His chest was tight and painful and he forced himself to draw a breath into his burning lungs.

Jim was kissing him before he knew what happened, his fingers clawing through his hair. He bit Sebastian's lip and pulled away ever so slightly. His hands were still in his hair, his face was up close and he stared into his eyes.

"Please what, Sebastian...?" he murmured, low in his throat. Jim's hand moved to Sebastian's face and stroked his jaw firmly and gently.

~

Even half crazed with desire and need, his mind dazed, frayed, drowned... beneath shivering skin, trembling muscles and the roar of his own blood in his ears, Sebastian felt a strange calm seeping into him.

It was decided.

Whatever Jim Moriarty wanted, he was giving it. Surrendering - his pride, maybe his independence... himself.

They were staring at each other, transfixed.

Like two animals, at the end of a battle, still, red in tooth and claw

One - baring its throat.

Accepting, whatever might come. Submitting.

Responding to the kiss, but not fighting any more. Tasting the blood, feeling the nip of teeth, but not
biting back.

The hands on his face, along his jaw, taking possession. Grounding him. Warding off any panic that might threaten to take hold at the sheer magnitude of what was happening here.

Then Jim's voice came, low, dark. Like crushed velvet, waiting for one rare jewel to be placed upon it.

Sebastian spoke.

"Please, Sir."

~

When Jim looked back on this moment, it was Sebastian's eyes he would remember.

How they shifted from stormy and tormented ...

to absolute clarity about what he needed... who he was... and what would happen next.

Before the words tumbled from his lips, Jim saw please and Sir in his eyes - as well as Take me and Whatever happens, I'm yours now.

Jim felt a current move through him as he stared into the crystalline blue of his eyes.

And he shivered at the moment they found themselves in, and longed for the heat of Sebastian's body that he could feel radiating from him.

But there was one thing he needed to do first...

He brought Sebastian's face closer to his and kissed him deeply.

"Yes, Sebastian... I will take you..." he whispered. "Just one thing left to do, darling..."

He stood up on the bed and stared down at him for a long moment.

Then he peeled off his boxer briefs and threw them aside.

He stepped down from the bed, and his fingers trailed along Sebastian's back as he passed.

Jim returned with the knife and knelt behind him.

He pressed the point of the knife into his flesh under his right shoulder blade.
"You've surrendered yourself to me, Sebastian... Now feel what it is to be mine..." Jim murmured into his ear. "It's going to hurt... and it's going to be fucking beautiful."

He sliced down with the knife and began to carve an elegant 'M' into his skin.

~

The kiss, the whispered promise, the glorious sight of Jim stark naked now, his hand trailing lightly across his back...

Sebastian didn't move. He didn't even try to turn his head to see where Jim was going, or what his intentions were. His brain, thrown out of any frame of reference it knew, just stalled.

But his heart was racing, for a few beats harbouring the absurd fear that Jim might not come back. But then he did. The point of a knife pressed into his back and had Jim purred into his ear that the one small thing left to do was to cut Sebastian’s heart out – it wouldn't have mattered.

His body begged to differ, and as the blade really dug in, Sebastian couldn't suppress a grunt and the visceral reaction of trying to move away. Going nowhere of course, as the unyielding hold of the restraints jarred through his body - as well as the dawning realisation of what Jim was about to do.

This wasn't the teasing whisper of the knife like before, with only the odd, eerily seductive nick of pain.

This was no surgery intended to heal nicely,

this was meant to scar, to mark him, to stay a part of him.

Biting the inside of his cheek with each new cut of the blade, was all Sebastian could do to keep from screaming - adrenaline and endorphins rushed through him in such an onslaught that he thought he might be sick at any moment.

~

Time seemed to slip sideways... as the knife slid through flesh, Jim felt himself almost falling into a trance. He was aware of the candlelight glowing in the darkness, and Sebastian's ragged breathing, and his own steady hand - he had to get this right. After all, it would stay on his flesh for a lifetime...

He paused as he considered this mark that showed Sebastian now belonged to him. It truly had been inevitable, given how Jim had reacted at the thought of anyone else touching him... and that was before... this.
This moment, well past the point of no return...

When Jim finished the last swipe down with the knife, he finally became aware of the trembling in Sebastian's muscles, the sheen of perspiration on his skin. Jim brought his hand to his hair and caressed it briefly, then reached for the restraints.

He unbuckled one and then the other, watched Sebastian's arms fall to his side. Jim looked over his shoulder and saw his eyes were closed.

"Stand up, darling..." he said softly. He watched him take a deep breath and stand unsteadily on his feet. Jim faced him and slid his hands along his chest and abdomen...

"You made it through to the very centre of the deep, dark woods, Sebastian... do you know how many people have been here?"

Jim took his hand and led him to the bed.

"Exactly one. Lie down, darling..."

Slowly he pushed his hand against Sebastian's chest until he sat. Then his hand continued to push him down, down, down toward the bed.

~

Jim's hand never faltered, not once. There was a strange, even perverse sense of reassurance in that, as if the insanity of blithely letting someone cut up your back was made totally acceptable by that someone not being an amateur.

Nauseating waves of heat and cold shook Sebastian and had him break into a sweat. He closed his eyes, and he could see searing lines imprinted on his retina, as vicious as the knife that left them, sliced, carved, *incised* into his flesh.

In his mind Jim's words echoed, the calm statement, that this had to be done and a realisation struck Sebastian. And brought a strange sense of peace with it.

This was... confirmation.

A promise.

That being *owned* by Jim Moriarty was something that - although outside any sanity and reason - went beyond any spoken word or vow, and was much more permanent.
The pain pushed him deeper and deeper into a place where it was something else than just force of will that kept him still, unmoving, even when it was finally done.

It was only when Jim lightly touched him that Sebastian was pulled back from it - enough to manage getting back on his feet, and staying upright.

Being welcomed to a place where no one else had ever been before.

Sebastian, still groggy and reeling, felt something he couldn't even grasp at first. Pride - utterly incongruous and the very last thing any sane person should feel after having a claim of ownership carved into your back, while on your knees, drenched in sweat and blood.

And then, Jim took him to bed.

His hand never left Sebastian's chest, as he pushed him down - no restraints necessary, no force required. Sebastian just went - with a wave of dizziness at the coolness of the satin sheets against his skin, and a new blaze of pain following immediately.

~

God, the sight of him...

bloody and trembling from Jim's special brand of attention and affection... from the ordeal of the journey... from the initiatory pain of becoming Jim Moriarty's...

but beyond that... his eyes blazed. There was more vibrance and life and fire than he has seen in his soldier yet. Coming from a deeper place than perhaps even Sebastian had known about...

He seemed to recognize that what Jim had done was not something he would have done for anyone else... and as painful and tormenting as it was, it was necessary. Because only someone who could face this kind of trial by fire would have the mettle to be able to handle Jim, see his true face - not as a mere dominating sex partner, but as something much greater.

And Jim could see that Sebastian understood that - clever soldier - and felt pride at his accomplishment, felt a sense of honour at what he was about to be shown, what he was about to feel... and only someone who could understand this would be able to survive Jim Moriarty.

He watched as his solider lay down in a daze... and then saw the wince and the sharp intake of breath that came when he leaned back against his wound.

Jim drank this in... and drank in the sight of the beautiful soldier laid out before him like a feast...
He dipped his head down to his thigh, pushed it aside slightly and nibbled on the tender inner flesh. Then he pushed his thighs apart wider and continued his ascent up with tongue and lips and teeth. When he reached the apex, he laid hands flat on his thighs and moved his head down to Sebastian's cock. He licked sinuously over Sebastian's balls, and then with a frustrated sound in his throat, Jim brought his lips down hard over his cock.

~

Just the predatory way Jim was leaning over him, pushing him back, let alone the promising sight of how he dipped down and settled between his thighs, was enough for yet another wave to sweep back in, one of lust and sexual thrill... The nip of teeth, the scrape of nails, and then again... god … Sebastian let his head fall back, a low moan vibrating in his throat, his hands groping through the sheets, blindly searching for something to hold onto. Only with considerable delay he realised they'd found something - his fingers closing. Soft, slightly damp strands of hair between them. ...

He had an inkling of that not being allowed …

Jim resurfaced, but before he could say or do anything, Sebastian had raised himself into a half-sitting position again and taken Jim by the shoulders, pulling him up, and closer. With a quick movement he rolled them both over. Never with the intention to come out on top, but just getting them properly onto the bed. He noticed Jim flailing briefly, but not counteracting anything, not effectively anyway. Sebastian, after a full turn, arrived on his back again, Jim above him once more, their combined weight sending a new stab of harsh, sweet agony into Sebastian's shoulder. A price well worth paying for feeling the whole length of Jim's heated, hard, naked body flush against his.

Fully aware of his transgression and impending reprimand, Sebastian loosened his hold, looking up at Jim. A bit smugly? Maybe. There was definitely a wild, barely concealed exhilaration blazing in his eyes.

And if Jim just continued teasing, he was going to scream - just not in the way Jim was aiming at.

~

Jim's slow journey up his soldier's body was interrupted abruptly... first by hands grasping his hair, which he was just about to put a stop to, and next as he found himself being pulled up by the shoulders against Sebastian's body - and then underneath him, pressed to the mattress - and then lying fully on top of him.

Sebastian's limbs were regaining strength. His eyes had gone feral. There was tension built up in him ready to burst free. And Jim had thought he'd been fully tamed??
Big mistake, Jimmy, he thought, fuming. Pro tip - establish control before you get carried away like a fecking hormone-addled adolescent with the dreamy blue-eyed boy! Jaisus...

Jim could feel his eyes flash as he glared down at the soldier he'd thought to be in a daze.

All right... then the scenic tour is done.

Jim reared up over him, and shoved Sebastian's arms up over his head. There was a glint in Sebastian's eyes and the ghost of a smile on his lips. Jim pressed his cock against Sebastian's, grinding against it. As his soldier's eyes closed briefly, Jim pulled a restraint from under the mattress and snapped it sharply over his wrist -

Click

- and their eyes locked. Jim snapped the other restraint into place -

Click

- and smiled down fiercely at him.

"Down, boy..." he purred. "Short leash for you, darling..."

He crushed his lips against Sebastian's and his tongue surged into his mouth.

~

The surprise effect didn't last long, but Sebastian fiercely enjoyed it, as well as the savage glint in Jim's eyes - and a flash of indignation - as he took back control. And Sebastian didn't object (he was learning, despite full domestication being an utter impossibility). He also wouldn't have gotten much opportunity to resist, because Jim wasn't just quick, determined and surprisingly strong, but very... distracting. Despite the sheets pressing against his cut-up back like razor blades at the movement, Sebastian's hips bucked against Jim's grinding down, trapping their cocks between them. A low noise caught in his throat and he closed his eyes.

With a sharp metallic click something took firm hold of his left wrist.

He eyes snapped open again and looked up into a wolfish grin, while the second cuff clicked shut. His brain had gone a bit muddy and quit trying to tell him it would be more appropriate to feel put out and not turned on by the devious little fucker treating him like an unruly dog...
He returned the possessive kiss just as greedily, but basically was reduced to merely reacting, the hard-edged metal around his wrists digging in, as he inadvertently pulled against them.

~

It was a hungry kiss, which quickly became aggressive - both their lips split open again and when Jim pulled away, he felt a trickle of blood down to his chin. He swiped at it with his thumb and stared at the smear of blood.

"I don't usually do any bleeding..." he mused, and licked it slowly.

Then his gaze lashed up to Sebastian's.

"You're determined to be the exception to every rule, aren't you..." Jim's eyes darkened, but he smiled with pleasure.

"Bend or break every rule you can...? Well, if I'd wanted a trembling pet, I'd be a bloody fool to choose you, wouldn't I? Just - Tread. Carefully. Darling."

He crawled over to the nightstand, pulled out a drawer and looked back over his shoulder.

"I've been tested. And I already know all your test results..."

He brought out a small tube of lubricant. Slowly he uncapped the tube, while staring at Sebastian.

"No righteous indignation, darling - this is a moment you'll not soon forget." Jim placed the lid on the nightstand emphatically and flashed a sharp predatory smile. He crawled back to Sebastian, dropped a small, damp kiss on the head of his cock, and flicked his tongue at it. Then in one swift, sharp motion he pushed Sebastian's knees up. "Spread your thighs for me, Sebastian..." he growled low in his throat. "I fucking want you."

~

Sebastian's eyes followed Jim's tongue, subconsciously mirroring him, dabbing his own against his bloody lip.
“Very fetching on you though,” he muttered, with the hint of a smile and yes, definitely a trace of smugness there too, “Snow White.”

Although admittedly Jim looked less hurt than like some man-devouring god after the first bite of flesh. Treading. Carefully. Definitely valid advice. Even though, or perhaps because it was something that didn't come easily to Sebastian.

Then he blinked. Jim had... “You...” - what?! But then again – the man knew his secret bank account, things from his past that never went on record, the make of the fucking scope on his fucking rifle, and probably also his shoe size, the way he drank his tea, and the date of his last tetanus shot (which, in the light of the evening, was a good thing). Sebastian gave a small huff of indignation, and amusement too. “How prescient.”

In a disturbing but also absurdly arousing way it made Sebastian feel naked, and exposed to a degree way beyond the mere physical position he was in. With a surge of heat even more of his blood abandoned his brain for much more immediately concerned parts, when finally he also grasped the implication that Jim was going to go without ...

Jesus...

This was really happening...

… brain still lagging behind, but cock twitching at the small kiss and the sight and sound of the lube bottle being uncapped...

(oh, good, not without that, thankfully…)

There was a flutter and the tiniest apprehensive twist in his guts as the hands he had willingly given himself into, now pushed his knees back, and up. Any other option than to just do whatever the low, predatory voice ordered him to do, simply... ceased to exist. Had ceased to exist hours ago, or maybe even a long time before that.

Jim's eyes, huge and dark, stayed locked onto his, and Sebastian didn't even remember anymore that before meeting this man he would have torn anyone to shreds, who'd harboured the bizarre notion that Sebastian Moran would let himself be chained up, on his back and literally beg to be fucked.

~

Jim watched, utterly and completely consumed, as his soldier slowly spread himself open to him... and as he rubbed lubricant on his own cock and into Sebastian's entrance, he found himself almost in a trance.
There were so many points along the journey of the last month and this entire evening that their paths might have diverged... but it was *inconceivable* to Jim that they would not have reached this moment... this pivotal moment of consequence which somehow felt more *real* than anything else in his life. It seemed to Jim that just outside his peripheral vision there must be bright flames, licking the edges of everything that lay outside of this room... outside of *themselves*...

And so, Jim experienced his own shift - though it was not seismic, not of the earth...

It was purely fire - guttering crimson, and searing away everything that came before in an incandescent flash.

Oh come the fuck *on*, he hissed at himself in a moment of panic. It's *sex*. It's *domination*. Don't tart it up as some *epic romantic drama*...

(Go on, Jimmy... take the dreamy soldier. Make it *epic* for him, darling... Make him *yours*...) his inner voice purred.

His eyes narrowed. He *is* mine, Jim rebuked the voice silently.

He rose over Sebastian, feeling like a dark, predatory force of nature. Jim's hand curled around his soldier's neck, his palm and his thumb resting on his throat. His hand tightened slightly.

His eyes devoured Sebastian before him, and feeling quite intoxicated at the sight, he positioned himself - moved the head of his cock in a circular motion against Sebastian's opening... then pushed into him firmly. He paused, a few inches in. Closing his eyes, he exhaled. A shiver moved through him.

"*Oh,*" he breathed, "Sebastian, darling... there's no getting out of the woods now…"

He continued his advance slowly and possessively, eyes fixed on his quarry.

~

Swallowing, Sebastian felt his throat move against the grip around his neck - a mere suggestion at first, then slightly tightening. Over the course of several hours in restraints, he had never been as aware of the shackles around his wrists as he was now. Nor of Jim's *presence*, closing in, radiating heat and danger and lust with such a feral intensity, Sebastian wanted to throw himself into it and bolt at the same time.

*Craving* what was about to happen, but also tensing involuntarily -
… Christ, no … worst possible moment for that…

- fuckitsbeenawhilemaybeJimcoul dslowthefuckdown-

His already disjointed thoughts shattered and fragmented into a million sharp-edged, glittering pieces, breath hitching in his throat,

- Apparently Jim couldn't –

Noted.

*Count your blessings* – lube and, a few seconds to adjust, after the first push.

The stretch and burn made his head swim, and the shiver running through his muscles might have been his own, or Jim's, or both…

He wasn't even able to grasp the words, but understood … every single one of them.

Then Jim, leaning in, moved again… with one slow, but unrelenting stroke, forcing himself deeper… and even with every pain receptor swamped and dulled after the past hours, Sebastian couldn't keep quiet. Breathing against the pressure of the hand on his neck, his groan sounded like something dragged out of his throat over shards of glass.

Jim's eyes, looking into his, were black pools, reflecting clusters of light from the candle flames. It was like gazing up into the vastness of a desert night sky, perception suddenly thrown out of focus, shifting … and for a moment you didn't look at pinpoints of light on a black canvas, but, through a myriad of tiny holes, into blazing infinity.

~

Jim felt his muscles strain as he kept himself from pushing into him too hard, too fast… there would be time enough for hard and fast. Sebastian was tight… how long had it been since he'd bottomed…?

Time enough to ask questions, too… so much information to gather…

He normally preferred to take someone from behind, but - there was no way in hell he would miss out on the emotions passing over Sebastian's face.

(And he is not just *someone*, is he…) the voice said slyly.
Jim paused for a moment, feeling Sebastian's muscles contract around his cock, and then relax slightly. He shivered at the delicious squeezing sensation, and exhaled.

Yes... fine.. he conceded. He's not just someone, I know... can I fuck the man until he's delirious, please?

(Mmm, delirium is delicious... just for him?)

Ignoring this, his hands curled around Sebastian's wrists, and he used them as leverage as he pushed forward again.

"Mmm... so tight..." he murmured. "So bloody hot, Sebastian..."

Jim stared down at him, his damp hair hanging over his forehead, his eyes gleaming with hunger and lust. His arms trembled with effort.

"Fuck..." he whispered, grabbed Sebastian's hips and yanked them up. He let out a groan as he closed the last of the distance between them. As he felt his cock buried to the hilt in Sebastian, he threw his head back, panting.

Oh -fuck-me-

He exhaled, his eyelids fluttering shut.

~

Leaning over him, pushing deeper, the voracious hunger in Jim's eyes bordered on desperation. They fixed on him with such an intensity it made scorch marks seem plausible.

Then theanchoring grip on his wrists disappeared and Sebastian made a deep, raw sound, low in his throat. His hands tried to follow, only to be reminded by the bite of the cuffs that they couldn't.

“Fuck ...” something incoherent followed, that seemed half curse, half prayer. Pulling his hips up, Jim had repositioned him, and with the different angle his cock brushed against the spot that sent
sparks up Sebastian's spine like a low voltage current. The final shove - Jim slamming into him in a full body assault - nearly made him white out from pleasure laced with pain. The freshly cut skin on his back felt like it was being torn into shreds, over and over again. With a thump, the heel of his right hand connected with the headboard, bracing himself against it.

But even over his own ragged breaths, Jim's low, husky voice still registered, prickling, like a hot, languorous touch trailing across his skin. He opened his eyes again, to the glorious sight of the man, lost in rapture, head thrown back, panting... The bared line of his throat, the tense muscles of his neck and shoulders, sleek and taut under a sheen of sweat … God, he looked gorgeous, savage, beautiful.

~

Jim breathed in deeply. He opened his eyes to see Sebastian staring up at him with a hunger and intensity he had never witnessed before. His breath caught in his throat. It seemed to rival what Jim himself was feeling, if not surpass it.

If the sounds Sebastian had made were anything to go by, the man would be in the palm of his hand before this fuck was even finished...

This being said, Jim was finding it hard to think, hard to strategize... he was seeing everything through a haze of lust and aggression and pleasure that was almost too much - and they had barely even begun.

Jesus Christ, Jimmy... you have him where you want him... now - fucking - claim - him...

Already mine, he snapped, his patience fraying.

Jim moved his hips experimentally, ground his cock into him and nearly moaned at the burning pleasure mounting in him. Being lodged in Sebastian’s hot, tight arse was out of this fucking world... but it was making it very difficult to apply his usual controlled, devastating moves...

He sucked in his breath, and pulled back slowly, almost completely.

Desperation flared in Sebastian’s eyes and Jim slid forward partway.
“Never fear, Sebastian...” he breathed. “There’s nothing on this green earth that can stop this now. God himself holds no sway here, the poor lamb... just leave everything up to me,” he growled, low in his throat.

He thrust forward into Sebastian again and despite his best intentions not to, he heard himself groan loudly and bordering on desperation.

~

At first the friction had been nearly unbearable. Now Sebastian gasped again, but at the loss of contact and sensation when Jim pulled back, nearly out. Then he pushed back in, with a move just slightly different, slowly, as if collecting information from every reaction, every hitching breath or shiver running through Sebastian’s body. Making the most delicious promises, in a low, husky voice. No, God had no place here - they were as far from heaven and as near to fire and brimstone as you could get without your skin blistering and bursting into flames...

Although barely able to move, one foot braced against the bedpost, at the next maddeningly slow stroke, Sebastian nearly bucked against it, his abdominal muscles tightening, hips canting, seeking that sensation again and … now it was Jim who groaned loudly… Jim, leaning into him, eyes closed, face etched with pleasure and concentration. Sebastian lifted his shoulders up, twisting forward, feeling the pull of the blood-soaked sheets sticking to the ravaged skin of his back...

Bared teeth fastened onto Jim's throat, and for an instant they seemed about to bite down, but then … just his tongue dragged lasciviously over the tender flesh they held between them... tasting heated skin and salt and something that was so entirely Jim it made him nearly delirious.

~

While Jim was trying to hold onto his control before it snapped, Sebastian took advantage of the pause and pulled himself up through sheer strength. Jim felt teeth latch onto his throat just enough to hold him in place and lick his flesh. Gingerly, he twisted his head around enough to stare at his soldier. He pulled his neck back slowly, dislodging himself from Sebastian's jaws.

He continued to stare hard at him, but Sebastian's gaze never wavered. He must be the only person in creation who could look him in the eye like this.

Jim had the strangest sensation of being seen, and huffed his disapproval.

Must remember to smack him later for this, he thought in annoyance.
For now, he reared over him like a venomous serpent. His kiss was like the strike of a cobra - lightning fast and vicious. He punctured Sebastian's lip, and then lightly caught his tongue in his teeth - gently he sucked his tongue, as he began to move his hips in a grinding circular motion.

He then slid his tongue into Sebastian's mouth in an act of possession as his cock surged forward.

It took him a while before he realized he'd been purely in the moment - kissing Sebastian heatedly while thrusting into him and grasping his hair.

Jim broke off the kiss, almost gasping. He glared in disbelief at Sebastian, his hands still twisting in his hair - before returning to kissing him in a fury, and burying himself in his body again and again.

~

Sebastian's teeth seemed to tighten a fraction when Jim started to pull back slowly, as if they didn't mean to let go, but then... after a last flick of his tongue... they did.

They were staring at each other, but it wasn't a contest – not anymore, or maybe it never had been. Yes, something was being established here, but even more so, it felt like finding their way into a new universe, the laws of nature already in place.

It was impossible that Sebastian would ever physically hurt Jim as much as Jim could, would... was entitled to hurt him. And - insanely enough - instead of confusing or alarming, this felt as right as barely anything had, ever before.

The mix of mindnumbing pleasure and rough, sweet violence Jim was dishing out was intoxicating - his tongue in Sebastian's mouth was now literally fucking him with the same possessive insistence as the hard length of his cock grinding into him.

The tight grip in his hair almost made his eyes water, and when the kiss was broken for a few seconds, Sebastian was panting, eyes half closed but virtually glowing. He looked up at Jim and into a glorious turmoil of fury, disbelief and lust. Jim dove down again, slamming into him, and Sebastian forgot even how to breathe. Then, with a raspy groan into the kiss, he felt like... unravelling. Simultaneously like being taken apart and held together, pinned down. His body arched against Jim's, nearly shaking now with pent-up desire and heat.

~

Jim felt Sebastian's body arching against his, and the hint of trembling in his muscles, and almost lost it.
Jesus fucking Christ...

His hands grasped Sebastian's hips, and pulled them up towards his pelvis repeatedly as he plunged his cock into him. Jim's body seemed to rip control from him, and his hips piston against Sebastian's.

There was heat and desire mounting in his cock, and at this moment there was nothing he wanted more than to just thrust into the sensation until he exploded in pleasure.

You're in control, he reminded himself firmly.

(I want to come in him... come hard and fast in the beautiful soldier...) his inner voice announced, making Jim shiver with longing.

Soon, he growled.

(No... Now.) There was iron determination under the silky tone.

Fuck...me.

Jim groaned, and his hand curled around Sebastian's cock.

"Don't come..." he breathed. "Until I say you can..." His hand moved up and slowly stroked down, squeezing. "Say it, darling..." he purred.

~

With an incoherent curse Sebastian blindly yanked against the cuffs, completely oblivious of the pain in his wrists, bruised and bloody by now. He needed, needed to get his hands on Jim...

or at least on his own cock, because even with Jim leaning over him, it wasn't quite enough... He'd never been able to come just from being fucked, no matter how close it got him...

And then the perceptive little fucker did just that and Sebastian bit off a moan.
And there was no bloody way he could slow down the wave of insane pleasure – pain was hurling him towards the point of no return, and if Jim's hand stayed where it was now... well - snowflake’s chance in hell he would last until permission was given. Sebastian tore his eyes away to take at least the visual out of the equation – the strong, pale hand, streaked with blood, closing around his cock...

Head thrown back, eyes closed, voice hoarse and raw, he uttered something very blasphemous, because now he felt everything with unbearable intensity - the rumpled sheets tearing at his back, the sweat burning in his eyes, the scratches, the nicks and grazes the knife had left... the heat of Jim's body around him... inside him and ...

_FUCK_ - wrong thought completely -

because it only forced him into unconscious movement against Jim.

“Please...”

And if he wouldn't let him...

he'd have to kill him, even with his hands chained to the bed…

So...

“Please, _Sir!_”

~

Sebastian's shout was a heady mix of longing and repressed violence... and it had the effect of a cataclysmic cocktail, making Jim instantly drunk with lust and possessiveness.

"Fuck yes, you’re mine..." he muttered darkly, and gripped Sebastian's hips hard enough to bruise. He began to thrust fiercely into Sebastian, not faster, but with precision and devastating rhythm - he stroked him with the same rhythm, making him moan and utter expletives at an increasing rate.

Jim grinned despite himself. "Quite the _mouth_ on you, Sebastian!" he murmured, getting a smile
which he promptly covered with his own, and then they were kissing again, hot and heavy.

Soon Sebastian was gasping against his lips, and Jim broke off the kiss. He threw his head back, lost to ecstasy - mouth dropping open, feral noises were escaping from his lips.

Shut up, Jim growled at himself but despite his best intentions, the noises continued to be ripped from deep in his throat. Heat and lust were mounting to an impossible level, and he whimpered for one moment as he felt himself teetering on the edge of a great abyss - his breath caught in his throat, and his body was rocked by violent shivering as an explosion of burning pleasure burst forth. Back arched, eyes closed, he dissolved into shuddering, and howled out his orgasm towards the ceiling. Dimly he wondered if it the ceiling might crack at the force he felt flying out of him.

He collapsed against Sebastian, a sweaty, shivering heap. "Fucking - hell - " he panted, trying to get his breathing back to normal. His eyes opened to see Sebastian watching him intently.

Jim shifted his weight off him and slowly pulled out, wincing. His hand rested possessively on Sebastian's cock. Right. Time to take control back.

"I've heard you come before..." he said in a silky voice. "Remember that sexy performance you put on for me in your apartment, with the camera pointing to the ceiling? Clever boy... now you're going to show me what I was missing..."

Jim's hand slid up his cock slowly and on the way down, he squeezed.

"And remember, darling... not until I say the word..." he said, eyes gleaming.

~

The unhurried, but harsh, insistent pace Jim set, nearly drove Sebastian to distraction, especially with the hand on his cock now doing the same. How he managed to hang on to the last vestiges of self-control at all, was beyond him. Cursing and swearing helped a bit, but had its limitations, like everything. Especially when, after breaking free of another messy, breathless kiss, Jim's movements became harder, less coordinated, and Sebastian, saw, felt... heard the moment Jim started to lose it. His own precarious, half-crazed state of arousal notwithstanding, seeing Jim teetering on the brink was absolutely spectacular, to witness him - from a front-row seat no less - going over... a thrill beyond compare. He was fucking glorious. His head thrown back, his body tensing, going rigid, and
then... howling out his pleasure, and Jesus bloody hell Sebastian's mind went completely blank at the sensation because he could fucking feel it...

And there weren't even words to describe how it felt, because words might well have ceased to exist... for the brief, mind-numbingly delicious seconds Jim wasn't anything else than a mindless, shivering mess. Slumped down on him, breath heaving, his eyes opening, for just one tiny moment... totally unguarded. Gone in a blink, and then Jim's weight was too.

When he pulled back, out... it made every torment he had inflicted on Sebastian through the course of the night pale into insignificance. The sudden, downright desolate sensation of emptiness tore a small pleading noise of sheer misery from him.

Back was teasing Jim, controlling Jim – with a silky voice and possessive hand on Sebastian's cock. He couldn't completely contain the movement with which his body wanted to press into the touch. But at the memory of his own little prank with the camera there was also the tiniest smirk crossing his face, which was then turned into a trembling gasp as Jim's hand stroked along his cock, tightening. Sebastian's hips jerked again, and beneath the roar of blood in his ears there was a desperate, keening sound... mindless, barely resembling anything that might come from a human throat, and he wasn't even aware anymore it was his own.

~

Jim had barely recovered from the orgasm which was unlike any he'd ever experienced before...

Fucking Christ, he thought in a daze. Sex with his soldier was dangerous... he would have to figure out how to not lose control like that next time. Physically was one thing, but emotionally it could be a disaster...

He searched his mind for solutions but all he could think of was Next time... next time... the words slid throughout his mind like a whispered promise...

He shook himself, and returned his focus to the task at hand - stroking the cock of his soldier who was in the midst of a meltdown. The keening was absolutely delicious, and Jim smiled with pleasure.

"Hmm... this sounds different than what I heard in your apartment..." he said innocently. "Is this turning you on more, Sebastian? Am I hotter than whatever tramp you dragged home?" His eyes narrowed, and he tilted his head and waited for Sebastian's response.

~

Jim was staring down at him, the look on his face absolutely impossible to read – no surprise there,
as this was a challenge even in full possession of your faculties, and Sebastian had rarely been as far from that as he was now. In his feverish haze he could hardly make sense of the question at first, let alone string together anything coherent that would pass as an answer. But the meaning had, roughly at least, sunk in and … wait - what?! Did the man who’d just turned him into a begging, shivering bundle of craving want, just ask him if… - Sebastian felt a hysterical tickle in his throat.

“Goodness me, not –“ *much faith in yourself!* With some basic brain function still intact, he prevented this from slipping out.

“Fuck…” The next slide of Jim's hand turned what might have been dangerously close to a laugh into a shameless moan.

“... not even the same library”, he panted, barely intelligible, and surely in a state that excused mixing up metaphors. Which didn't matter, because all this was purely rhetorical anyway.

“And you fucking know it.” It was no use to even try not to think of the hand on his cock, because it was all he could feel, that and the devastating heat, coiling tighter and tighter, making his muscles tremble.

～

"Goodness me!” Jim repeated, amused. "Not even the same library, you say! I'm so pleased to hear this, Sebastian..." he swooped in and grabbed Sebastian's chin firmly. His eyes flashed at him. "And, yes - I do know it, honey. I know it quite well... I just want to make sure you fucking know it...” he snarled, and kissed him hard. His hand stroked harder. When Sebastian was groaning against his lips, Jim broke off the kiss.

"Darling, you've been so good..." he said breathily, gazing into his eyes. "I think you've waited long enough, don't you?"

Expertly, he flicked his wrist and stroked hard and fast.

"Come for me, Sebastian... I want you to...” he whispered, lips parted.

～

Well, Sebastian knew that, and knowledge of anything beyond Jim’s hotness ceased to exist...

Finally, at last... it seemed to be just the mere voice of this man that took him apart - just a few words, breathed against his lips...
... for me, Sebastian... I want you to.

Not just an order, not just permission... but something of prophetic, profound clarity that told him that now he could really let go... and so he did. With a hoarse shout that encompassed everything - capitulation, surrender, and release. His climax crashed through him in a blinding, heart-stopping wave, obliterating everything. Hurled into oblivion or chaos – it didn't matter anymore, because at its centre was one crystalline truth, never to be changed again.

... for me, Sebastian... I want you to.
Jim watched in fascination as Sebastian's body shivered in response to his words. Within a moment, he came with a loud cry that made Jim's body tingle and the hair on his skin stand on end. The back of his neck prickled, and Jim found himself deliciously shivering as he witnessed what looked like not just an orgasm, but an ecstatic spiritual awakening.

On some level Jim was aware of a fluttering sensation in his heart, which he didn't even try to quell because he was so transfixed by what was unfolding before him. Wide-eyed, he observed Sebastian falling back against the pillows and panting.

Jim wiped his hand on a tissue, and used another one to clean the evidence of Sebastian's orgasm/religious experience from his abdomen.

When Sebastian opened his eyes, Jim felt a current move through him as their gazes met. They stared at each other frozen for a long, hushed moment, before Jim moved to release him from the restraints.

There was nothing but the sound of Sebastian's breath, and metal mechanisms sliding open. Jim lifted his hand to observe Sebastian's wrist, scraped and bleeding from the cuffs. There was a shadow of bruising forming under the skin.

"I'll need to treat these wounds... your back, too. First you'll need a shower... things got a little... " his lips quirked and he arched an eyebrow. "Messier than anticipated. But these things happen, don’t they..."

Wrong, he protested in his mind. These things don't happen. Ever.

Jim sat up. "Let me show you to the bathroom. And careful getting up! You seem to have bled rather a lot..." he said with an innocent smile.

~

The aftermath of whatever chemicals flooded one’s system during an experience like this left Sebastian dazed. Moving anything, anything that needed even the tiniest conscious effort to do so, seemed a task not even worth contemplating.

Breathing... still worked.
His heart, too - every beat heavy and slow, the fraction just before each pause reverberating as deep as the marrow of his bones. Steady.

Grey flecks like snow, sluggishly drifting behind closed lids.

More sensations started to creep back in.

Sweat and - no point in being delicate – blood and come drying stickily on his skin.

Most notably: pain of some variety or other, but all of it strangely dulled, muffled, as though swathed under thick layers of cotton wool.

Something prodded at the back of his mind, trying to tell him that any sane person should find what had been happening, and the effect it had on him, alarming - or at least mildly disconcerting.

Instead, through the drowsiness from blood loss, the haze of receding pain, and post-fuck nirvana, one thing permeated: feeling content.

He felt strangely at peace, as if something had been… settled.

When he finally did open his eyes, he looked into Jim's. He seemed to be intently observing him, but a bit entranced as well. Then he stretched up alongside him, and Sebastian heard and felt the cuffs being opened.

Well, they said when you tripped out there should always be someone with you who kept their wits about them... to clean up any mess, to take care of any damage. (And who more competent for that than the one who had caused the trip, the mess and the damage?)

Pragmatic little neat freak, Sebastian thought with a half grin. But he also knew Jim was right, and so he did just as he was told. He slowly got up, wincing slightly when he felt the blood-soaked sheet sticking to the cuts in his back, and then being pulled away.

One might expect it to be a bit awkward to come down from all this, back to the mundane necessities - to pad naked and bloody down the hallway, following the man who'd just whipped and fucked you into oblivion. But strangely enough, it wasn't.

~

Jim watched Seb carefully to make sure he was stable on his feet before leading him to the bathroom. He glanced back - still upright, but with a somewhat dazed expression. Satisfied, Jim turned around with a smile.
Once inside the bathroom, Jim handed towels to him and Sebastian took them silently and looked at him. Jim hovered for a moment.

What, do I need to turn on the shower for him? Shampoo and condition his hair? he thought in exasperation.

He turned to leave, but something tugged at him. He shut the door and turned on the shower.

"Not that we're on a romantic honeymoon or anything..." he said drily, "but I'm rather concerned your unfortunate blood loss will cause you to slip and crack your head open. I can't have that, with my best assassin and future hotshot in the organization, can I?" He raised an eyebrow and pushed him towards the shower. "In. You look like an escapee from some deranged sex dungeon..." Jim smirked, and looked down at his own blood-streaked, sticky body and hands. "And I'm considerably messier than I normally get... so I'll get pristine while supervising your non-concussive shower - and then we'll take care of all those wounds..."

Sebastian hesitated and put the towel down on the counter. Jim sighed, and pulled Sebastian by the hand into the shower with him.

"Did I accidentally hit your head?" he asked wryly. "What happened to that sassy mouth, Sebastian?"

~

The bathroom he followed Jim into was about the size of his own living room, luxurious in black and eggshell white, chrome and glass. The tub big enough to drown somebody in, and the walk-in shower fit for an orgy (the gleaming handrail presumably there for reasons other than to please the HSE - God, and the direction in which his mind went, so soon after - definitely made him certifiable.)

He automatically took the towels Jim gave him, but any multitasking skills were definitely not yet up and running. For the moment he was fully occupied by just taking in the sights, or rather the one
right in front of him: Jim. Usually fastidious and impeccably groomed, he now exuded the captivating, languorous energy of a predator just after the kill. It was riveting…

At first, it seemed he was about to leave, but then… he didn’t. And why did Sebastian feel so relieved at that? Silly... as if he wasn't able to take a bloody shower by himself!

Then Jim came up with a whole host of sensible reasons to stay, even though at least half of what he said just passed over Sebastian like background noise...

A few things slipped through, helped along by some physical hints like gently getting pushed towards the shower. Right, he better leave the towels outside then... Christ, he didn't know they were in such a rush! But good thing Jim came with, because Sebastian would have been hard pressed to work out all the knobs and buttons of the high-tech contraption posing as a shower. Yes, he might have resigned to scalding himself in the process of getting the hang of what looked more like the control panel of a spaceship than a bloody shower.

“Nah, no need for that,” he muttered, suppressing a grin, “you're perfectly capable to simply talk anyone into a stupor.”

And there went the plan to Tread. Fucking. Carefully.

(Shit.)

~

There it is, Jim thought with delight. That sassy mouth... just begging to be slapped. Well, the poor sweet thing had been through so much... He'd give him some recovery time, and then the gloves were off. Jim grinned madly at him.

"Aww... D'you really think so, Sebastian?" He batted his eyelashes at him like a lunatic, before stepping under the spray of the water. "I was wondering what your pillow talk would be like! You're so sweet..."
He rinsed himself off, and lathered up with body wash before nudging Sebastian into the spray. "It's going to hurt... but you've never been afraid of a little pain, have you..."

Sebastian winced as the water hit his back, and Jim handed him a bar of soap. "Here - clean yourself up and I'll do your back." He smiled innocently while Sebastian began soaping his blood-streaked skin.

Jim opened up a shampoo bottle and applied the fragrant liquid to his hair. "Have you enjoyed Chez Moriarty thus far, darling?" he asked, shutting his eyes. "I do hope the service has been to your liking... we don't often have recovering aristocrats gracing us with their presence..." Opening his eyes, Jim flashed a smirk at Sebastian and pushed him out of the way so he could rinse his hair.

~

Well he would have happily just stood there, providing a bit of pillow talk and watching the spectacle of Jim showering, but of course, it wasn't to be. His aching muscles relaxed blissfully under the hot water, while his ravaged skin screamed with all the searing line, scrapes and small cuts Jim's knife and nails had left. Soaking and soaping all the blood and sweat and stickiness away, there was no escape from the inevitable, so he finally turned his back into the spray. Even awaiting the pain, it was still a shock.

Fighting a wave of dizziness, he briefly braced himself against the handrail, dropping his head between his arms. The water swirling around his feet turned a deep crimson, making the luxurious tiles look like the drain of a fucking abattoir. But with whatever Jim used to wash his hair, it certainly smelled a lot better, and after a few deep breaths he felt steady enough again.

“Well, it feels like I've only just arrived,” he answered Jim's question with a grin, “but the interior is certainly… riveting, as is the company...“ He got a bit distracted watching a small trail of glistening white foam sliding down Jim's neck, and pooling in the soft hollow behind the sharp edge of his collar bone and... he cleared his throat and returned the smirk, hoping Jim hadn't caught him staring when he opened his eyes. Placidly he let himself be pushed out of the way, and with Jim closing his eyes again, he happily resumed watching soap suds being rinsed off gleaming skin...

“- if the food's on a par with the rest of the service, I think I'll give it the full five stars on Trip Advisor.”
Underneath the water, Jim listened to Sebastian's commentary and shook his head. "Oh, we aim to please, Sir! If a fine cultured gentleman such as yourself feels this way, then it makes all the hard work worth it. DO hand me the conditioner, won't you?" He held out his hand expectantly, and a bottle was placed in it a moment later. Jim opened his eyes, and satisfied with what he saw, moved away from the water and lathered his hair with the contents. Another fragrant scent filled the steamy air.

"All right... let's see your back then..." Jim sniffed, and twirled his finger at Sebastian, who hesitated and turned around.

Jim lightly touched his back and hummed with pleasure. Once healed, the 'M' would be gorgeous, he thought glowingly. Who knew mastery with a knife would pay off artistically like this?

"Brace yourself..." he warned, and lightly ran the soap over the carved initial. Sebastian inhaled sharply, and Jim lightly caressed his tricep without thinking.

He shook his head at himself in disgust. What next - should I feed him soup in bed? he thought in irritation.

He soaped his entire back, cleaning small cuts and washing away the remnants of blood.

As the water streamed over his broad back, Jim realized he was no longer examining cuts but Sebastian's musculature. Mesmerized, his eyes swept along his powerful body, and he became very focused on their difference in height.

An image flashed through his mind of Sebastian pressing Jim's body against the shower wall while he gripped the handrail. He ejected the thought promptly, and slapped Sebastian's arse, enjoying the wet smacking sound.

"You're done, soldier..." He pulled him out of the way of the spray and rinsed his hair. "I'll treat your wounds and then you need to hydrate and eat some protein before you sleep. It's fucking late, Sebastian... you kept me up half the night, resisting the inevitable. I don't know what you were thinking when we both had a job the next day!" Jim flashed him an indignant look, turned off the water and stepped out of the shower.

"Lucky for you, I thought ahead and rescheduled. I had a feeling you'd be recalcitrant...You're
welcome," he said with faux graciousness.

Jim picked up a towel and started drying off. As Sebastian processed this information with his trademark smirk, Jim shook out his hair, sending a spray of water towards him.

~

Something told him he should feel riled up about Jim's incessant needling about his aristocratic background, while in the same breath brazenly ordering him around... Something else inside him was doubled over with howling with amusement at the notion, because - really?! After what he'd just let the man do to him – had, in fact begged him to do...

“If I didn't know better, I'd think I'm detecting some kind of inferiority compl-“ The rest transformed into a hiss and a soft, bitten off curse, as the bar of soap passed over the cuts on his back with more pressure than strictly necessary. Followed by fingertips briefly brushing his arm - light, reassuring, and certainly accidental. It left him reeling just as much as the pain. He held onto the handrail with white knuckles, but at least half managed to suppress an undignified little jump at the dismissive, gleeful smack Jim gave his arse when he was finished.

While Jim stood under the spray to rinse his hair, Sebastian took a glass from the countertop near the washbasin. Filling it with cold water and drinking, he looked around and opened a few cabinet doors, peeking inside. Normally it might have crossed his mind to at least ask before he did what could be seen as an intrusion, or violation of privacy... But those concepts had gone so far out the window during the past hours, that at the moment he didn't even remember they existed.

Behind the third door he found what he was looking for. “Quite the stash...” While listening to Jim bemoaning the loss of beauty sleep due to a recalcitrant bedmate, Sebastian rooted around a bit.

Either Jim hoarded the leftovers of any medical prescription, or he was really well prepared for all contingencies.

“You what?” He looked over his shoulder. “You cancelled that thing in Lambeth? Because of... ” He shook his head and couldn't help but grin when turning back to the blister pack of Keflex in his hand. He took out two and downed them, followed by a chaser of Ibuprofen with another glass of water.

“Mission very thoroughly planned, huh?” he asked, and then, casually: “How often do you do this
kind of thing?” Damn, had he just said that? Sounding like a jealous bloody teenager. ”Strike that”, he muttered, turning towards Jim again, and was met by a spray of water.

~

Jim looked up with an innocent expression as he hung up his towel.

“I’ll decide what I strike, thank you…” he drawled. “You’re asking me how often I do this? Do you have any idea how many of your hook-ups I became aware of since you swaggered onto my radar? And you’re implying I’m a tramp? I knew you had cheek… but this takes the biscuit, darling….”

Jim observed him for a moment, arms crossed. “It doesn’t happen very often these days, if you must know… I grew rather tired of disappointment! I didn't want to take a gamble on you, but -” Jim arched an eyebrow. "Sometimes these things take on a life of their own. And I have to say, Sebastian... you’ve been delightful... Now if that answer satisfies, turn your arse around. His Lordship has acquired a most beautiful wound, and I need to treat it.” Jim picked up a tube of antibacterial ointment already on the counter, and looked back at Sebastian.

"Oh, do just help yourself to anything, darling...” he said pointedly.

~

Oops. Open mouth, remove foot.

“God, you're prickly,” Sebastian mumbled from behind the towel he was drying his hair with.
“That's not what I meant to imply. Just...”

Well, just what, Moran? Wanted to know if you're special, or just the most recent one in a whole line of bloody 'M's walking around? Christ, how pathetic, he scoffed at himself.

“... never mind…” He tried to extricate himself from what could only get more precarious the more he said. And yet, as Jim went on, he recognised that needling, unwanted, and utterly exhilarating rush, because he'd felt it before, a few hours ago – in a daze of pain and arousal when he heard the words:

... the very centre of the deep, dark woods, Sebastian... do you know how many people have been
Yes, the answer did satisfy. He struggled to keep a neutral expression and not look too smug, while he did as he was told and turned around - with a sneak peek over his shoulder, catching a glimpse of Jim's handiwork in the mirror. God, it was beautiful. Thankfully not as gruesome as the signature the tiger had left down his front, but no less vicious and permanent. And just as... no, more personal.

While Jim started to tend to his artwork Sebastian slowly and cautiously used his left hand to close the cabinet.

“Thank you,” he smiled and tapped a finger against the medication he'd chosen and left outside for later use. “Wouldn't want to bother the boss with a sick note.” Even though the knife had not been the one Jim had sliced the apple with earlier, it had been anything but an antiseptic procedure.

And offence being the best defence, he then said, “You know, you could have just stopped stalking me if you saw so much you didn't like...?”

~

Jim blinked in response, as he finished affixing gauze against the wound with tape.

Did he just- yes. He did...

He laughed, low in his throat. The kind of laugh that Sebastian should recognize as dangerous - if he wanted to stay alive for long.

He leaned over Sebastian's shoulder, looking at him in the mirror.

"If I see something I don't like, Sebastian..." he said softly. "I don't back off. I solve the problem..."

He slowly pressed his lips into Sebastian's shoulder, and flicked his tongue out against his skin.

"Problem solved. And if you didn't enjoy being stalked... you wouldn't have come home with me. But you didn't just enjoy it, did you... You like being my prey, and being at my mercy..."

Jim licked along the top of Sebastian's shoulder, and sank his teeth into the tender spot where his shoulder met his neck, then let go suddenly. "Or I may have been mistaken," Jim said innocently, pulling him by the arm to turn around. He held Sebastian's arms out and examined his wrists, badly scraped and bruised. Jim looked knowingly at him. "And if you weren't enjoying the hunt so much... you would have said something. You're not exactly afraid to open that sassy mouth, are you?"
Jim applied disinfectant to his wrists before adding some antibacterial ointment and bandaging them up.

"This looks like a suicide attempt," Jim said wryly, holding up Sebastian's wrists. "But then... you knew the risks going into that room... and in the end, the old you died there. Isn't that so?" He dropped Sebastian's wrists and looked him up and down. "And the new you came out with such pretty stripes... the question now is what to do with you, Tiger?"

And Jim walked out of the bathroom and down the stairs towards the kitchen.

~

Sebastian could try to tell himself it was just the hands tending to the knife wounds on his back, that kept him stock-still. But even more so, it was that low noise Jim made, which sounded like a laugh, but felt like the fangs of a beast around his throat – playfully touching but warning you to never forget it could bite down any moment.

He looked up and their eyes met in the mirror. Sebastian couldn't ... didn't even attempt to break their gaze, while Jim drove home the truth, with every word, kiss, flick of his tongue, and finally a bite. Sebastian's eyelids flickered as they wanted to close, and he could barely stifle a moan. Beneath the confusing mass of sensation and emotions there was something still trying to grasp all this, incredulously staring through the haze at a question he might never be able to find a rational answer to: what had happened to the things that were the very core of Sebastian Moran... - that fierce pride and aggression, that self-reliance and independence...?

He hadn't lost them. He hadn't left them in that room full of fiery shadows and the smell of blood, adrenaline and sex. He had – not without a fight but completely of his own free will - given them to this man. Whom he now gave his wrists to, as he had at the beginning of the night. To put around them whatever he pleased – be it restraints or bandages...

It shifted the foundations of the world and his place in it, and yet – this was solely between the two of them. What he had given to Jim Moriarty had never been, and would never be, anyone else's to take.

The things he'd gotten in return should have - in any sane person's perception - felt humiliating, but they didn't. The way battle scars didn't either. Nor the name Jim had just bestowed on him.

Sebastian, his head cocked slightly, was still listening to the sound of it when Jim had already left the room, and there was a glint of teeth in his smile...

Well - sane was probably the last thing either of them were.
He found a few more medical supplies in the cabinet and taped some of the smaller cuts as well, then he drank another glass of water to attempt to clear the slight fuzziness in his head. When he finally left the bathroom, there was no sign of his host... Right. Now that the night's entertainments had ended, apparently the only thing left to do was call a cab. And maybe he should also get some clothes on him first. After a brief pause, he walked across the landing and entered the room they had spent the past hours in. Jesus, you could hardly breathe in here. Did Jim have a cleaning lady? Sebastian felt a small chuckle tickle his throat at the thought of her in here - she'd better not be the squeamish type. But, working for Jim Moriarty he supposed she would be anything but...

It was nearly dark, as most of the candles had guttered out, and so he just picked his way through the room, retrieved his clothes and went outside again to put them on.

~

Jim started climbing the stairs and halfway up, he faltered. He was bringing a tray of fancy food to eat in bed... Did this seem... romantic?? When he spotted Sebastian in the hallway, Jim continued walking up. Too late to head back, and Sebastian would probably notice if Jim pitched the tray down to the main floor.

Wait - why the fuck was he getting dressed?? Jim passed by him, purposely knocking into Sebastian's brawny shoulder (Jesus Christ, was he hot...), and headed for the bedroom.

“What in the hell are you doing? Trying to pass out from blood loss and break your neck? Well, I don't want to spend my day off cleaning broken bodyguard off the stairs. Now get your arse in here....” he said in a blithely bitchy tone, and slipped into the bedroom.

Jim smiled as he sensed Sebastian follow him in quietly. "I did tell you not get the idea that is a romantic honeymoon... well, don't start picking china patterns yet, Sebastian. You need to replenish your fluids and have some protein. And I want to check your wounds in the morning. And since you've made a complete mess of the guest bed, you obviously can't sleep there." Jim threw the tray down on the bed.

"Get a towel from the bathroom - I will not allow any bleeding over my 1500 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets." Jim watched as Sebastian eyed the tray and then headed for the bathroom.

"I expect the full five stars on Trip Advisor, Tiger," he called after him with a sly smile.

~
For a brief, somewhat absurd moment they froze, staring at each other, without a stitch on them - Jim halfway up the stairs, with a tray of food, Sebastian on the landing, on one leg. He just starting to attempt getting into his clothes (without tearing off any tape or bandages), which he aborted when Jim playfully knocked into him in passing.

"What...?" - But Jim beat him to the question. And Sebastian had to admit, he wasn’t only secretly pleased, but a bit relieved as well. The prospect of spending the rest of the night in a bed without Jim... didn’t hold much appeal. And in the state he was in, the process of getting there might even turn out a bit hazardous...

“Well, I couldn’t just assume I’d be watered, fed and stabled for the night, could I?” he asked reasonably. But he did suddenly realise how ravenous he was. So he followed the bare arse of the most delectable waiter ever and the tray of food... into Jim’s own bedroom.

Which was quite different from the den they had spent the last hours in. Lighting, furniture, colouring... everything of sleek, subdued elegance.

Sebastian’s knees nearly buckled at the sight of pristine white sheets – which were, of course, not meant to be bled upon. Got it. So he dropped his clothes onto a chair and doing as Jim asked, went to get a towel from the bathroom.

And no worries, he wouldn’t get ideas... This was all for very pragmatic reasons - he got that, too.

But God, now he needed a smoke, badly.

Coming back, he lobbed the towel onto the bed and then dug around in his clothes. He found his lighter and cigarettes, then paused. Not surprisingly, the room did not look as if anybody ever smoked in here.

“I – uhm...” He made a vague, slightly sheepish gesture in the general direction of the hallway/bathroom. He was totally okay with leaving to smoke (although he might have to deduct a tiny sliver off that fifth star).

~

Jim sat on the bed against the pillows and began to pop grapes into his mouth as he watched his soldier. As well as revelling in Sebastian’s breathtaking nakedness, Jim was also very much enjoying the look in his eyes - a mix of hunger and awe as he took in the view of Jim in bed, naked and suggestively eating grapes. His soldier appeared to be properly hooked, and Jim found himself smirking.

Sebastian stood still as he glanced around the bedroom, taking in his surroundings, Jim was just about to order him into bed, when a towel hurtled through the air and landed on the bed next to him
in an untidy heap. Towel forgotten, Sebastian then started rooting through the pockets of his trousers. Jim eyed the towel next to him and then the cigarette pack and lighter that appeared in Sebastian’s hands. He wasn’t thinking of lighting up in here, surely, he thought grimly.

But then he made a self-conscious gesture of needing to excuse himself from the room, and Jim straightened up.

“Enough fussing, sit your arse down. You can engage in your disgusting habit here. Use this,” Jim slid the grapes onto the cheese plate, and waved an empty bowl at him. “The bowl will be tainted, and the set will be ruined - but I was tired of this pattern, anyway. Sit.” He leaned back and bent his knee, displaying himself shamelessly. He continued to eat grapes in a sultry manner and stare at Sebastian with amusement.

~

Jim eyed the towel that had been thrown unceremoniously towards the bed with the same slight disgust as the cigarette between Sebastian's fingers. So the sudden relaxation of the Chez Moriarty no-smoking policy took Sebastian somewhat by surprise.

“Thanks,” he said, genuinely grateful, as he’d been caught between needing his fix and the sheer impossibility of tearing his gaze away from the delicious display the beautiful little fucker had made of himself - hair still slightly damp and dishevelled, his lean naked body relaxed, eating grapes in a way that made you no longer care about food.

Sebastian walked over, drinking in the sight as unabashedly as Jim provided it.

He sat down somewhat gingerly (which certainly seemed to be a source of amusement) and took the little china bowl that had just been designated as an ash tray. He put the cigarette between his lips, lit up, and inhaled deeply, closing his eyes. Exhaling, a few seconds later, with a blissful groan. The relaxed expression on his face turned into a small smile and, gradually into something else. He was vibrating with a suppressed laugh, while he, eyes still closed, took the second drag from his cigarette.

He cleared his throat. “Sorry...” He blinked, trying hard to regain a straight face. He brushed ash off the tip of the cigarette, which felt like positively defiling the posh little piece of china. “I know, not my place, but... if you do need someone to help pick a new pattern...” He felt the laughter rise again and for a moment wasn't sure he could prevent himself from going into a fit. But maybe Jim could indulge him, it had all been... a bit much.

He drew his feet onto the bed. With the distracting sting of the welts all down his backside he barely caught himself before leaning his back into a pillow. With his elbow he shoved it a bit to the side and against the headboard, so he could lean on it in a way that favoured the side with the cuts.
Jim was grinning as Sebastian walked towards the bed as if mesmerized. His grin slowly faded as he watched Sebastian light up, and take a pull off the cigarette. Jesus... he had seen him smoke in surveillance footage but it did not compare to up close and personal. Because it was a fucking thing of beauty to watch... what, did he practice in front of a mirror to look cooler than cool? And so unbelievably sexy?? He was distracted from watching him smoke as Sebastian looked as though he was fighting against laughter. Jim blinked and tried to focus on what he was saying. What?

~

He tilted his head and stared perplexed as Sebastian was clearly trying not to dissolve into hysterical laughter. "Oh. Would you? What a sweetie..." Jim said drily. "Tell me, sweetie-pie - how does a man of such a distinguished background develop the manners of a savage? Does throwing the towel in a heap and then sitting near it somehow equate to using it, in your mind? Give me that," he snatched the cigarette out from Sebastian's lips, and took a drag.

"Disgusting habit," he said, leaning back against the headboard and exhaled smoke. "Now get on the towel, or I'll finish this in front of you and watch you flush the rest."

Jim took another drag, gave him a sharp smile, and blew smoke at him. Sebastian wasn’t the only one who looked fucking cool sucking on a coffin nail, he thought, pleased with himself.

~

Shit... yes – that. Sebastian made a small, apologetic noise around his cigarette, when it was snatched from him mid-drag. Sitting up he reached for the towel. God, moving again after the first short reprieve in a relaxed position, everything protested – every cut and bruise, stiffening muscles, shoulders, knees... Any contortions out of the question, he moved off the bed briefly, and spread the towel - basically shutting the door behind a bolted horse, because there already was a small smudge of blood. Rather gingerly, lay back down. Watching Jim smoke. Never mind the grapes - he doubted there was anything Jim could take into his mouth without making it look downright pornographic if he just chose to do so.

Sebastian had no clue if it was justified to feel so strangely at ease. After all – that was the moment when some spiders bit the head off their mates, because – purpose served.

Maybe his instincts, having been overridden so many times that night, had sulkily decided they couldn't be arsed anymore. On the other hand, they still prevented him from simply snatching back his cigarette.

Raising his arm in Jim's direction, he just held out two fingers.

He got it back, and, savouring every pull, smoked it down to a stub slowly. Then he put it out and placed the ash tray down beside the bed. With the same dedication, he then applied himself to the task of diminishing the food on the tray.
Jim had done surveillance of Sebastian both before and after the commencement of his employment. But observing him up close and personal was even more fascinating.

He watched Sebastian cover up the smudge of blood with the towel. (Mmm-hmm... we'll just save mentioning that for the future.)

He watched Sebastian smoke his cigarette like it was bloody salvation, and suspected the no-smoking rule in the flat would be difficult to be disciplined about. Jim already wanted to watch him put another one in his mouth. (Seriously... get it the fuck together, Jimmy...)

He watched Sebastian begin to systematically devour everything on the tray, one dish at a time. Jim completely forgot to eat, but he wasn't all that hungry - not for food, anyway. He managed to take a cream cracker with cheese and ham, and a spoonful of chocolate mousse. And stared as the rest disappeared into Sebastian's mouth with no mercy.

He couldn't help himself... as Sebastian licked the last spoonful of mousse like he was in a state of rapture, Jim laughed in disbelief. "Have you had quite enough, darling? Good thing I was only peckish!" He looked pointedly at the empty tray, then stood and picked it up. "Are you still hungry? I think I saw a leftover roast, I could put it in between two slices of bread for you...? Or should I just sit you in front of the refrigerator with a fork?"

God, it was delicious. And he even put the exquisite selection into an order that seemed appropriate...! There were little crunchy things with a Mediterranean flavour, small spicy meat balls, quails eggs, bite-sized pies filled with chicken, dates wrapped in ham, sushi (well, he didn't think Prometheus had suffered for mankind so they would continue to eat raw fish, but... ate it anyway), cold roast beef slivers, grapes, pineapple chunks, cream crackers and four different cheeses, tiny pastries and a quite heavenly chocolate mousse.

When his first ravenous hunger was stilled, he realised Jim seemed more focused on watching him than eating. Which didn't faze him in the least, as surely Jim wasn't someone who couldn't, or wouldn't fend for himself if the situation called for it?

So he probably wasn't hungry. He was also laughing in disbelief when Sebastian had polished everything off, offering him to dredge up more if necessary, or, to simplify matters, give him access to the fridge.
“Well, the fork would be dispensable... but yes, sounds marvellous,” Sebastian grinned, then shook his head. Thank you, I'm fine.” For now. Well, what could he say? Owning a tiger didn't come easy, and it didn't come cheap. He sighed contentedly and took a swig from the bottle of water -the only thing not emptied yet.

“Well, the fork would be dispensable... but yes, sounds marvellous,” Sebastian grinned, then shook his head. Thank you, I'm fine.” For now. Well, what could he say? Owning a tiger didn't come easy, and it didn't come cheap. He sighed contentedly and took a swig from the bottle of water -the only thing not emptied yet.

“Seriously, this was really good. So – compliments to the Maître d'hôtel.“ And Fortnum & Mason, probably.

He retrieved his luxurious china ashtray, slowly, to see if there was any objection, and when there wasn't, lit a post dinner cigarette.

~

Jim left Sebastian smoking in his bedroom, on his luxury sheets which he'd already stained with blood. And Jim was carrying down a tray of plates, as if he were the fucking help. Well, things would go differently when Sebastian had his strength back...

As Jim walked down the stairs, he mused about what that meant, exactly - how often did he anticipate this would happen??

He had initially thought it would be fun for a night, and then after that, whenever the mood struck. Next thing he knew he was cutting a fucking 'M' into his back, as if he was carving his initial into a tree like a modern-day Romeo. Or was he Juliet? M is for Montague, he thought, and then shook his head at this ridiculous line of thought. If he was Romeo, then his Juliet was a muscular death machine with the appetite of a tiger... who looked sexy as fuck sucking on a coffin nail... and seemingly couldn't stop himself from making sarcastic comments for a bloody moment...

The only way to shut Sebastian's mouth would be to gag him or put something in it, Jim thought as he carried the tray into the kitchen. The former didn't seem right for the moment and Jim wasn't in any condition to do the latter... which is why he'd let food do the heavy lifting for him.

His soldier was amusing as hell, no doubt about it... but Jim just had to be sure it didn't segue into not taking his employer fucking seriously. Funny little comments were fine and good as long as Sebastian knew when to shut the fuck up and do as he was told. Jim would just have to use Tiger's military training to his best advantage, he thought as he poured himself some cold filtered water. Plenty of time for that, he thought lazily as he leaned against the counter and gulped the water down, suddenly realizing how thirsty he was. He looked at the tray of dishes - normally he tidied things up right away. But suddenly he wanted to return to the muscular death machine filling his bedroom with smoke.

When he returned, Sebastian was still smoking and smiled when he saw him. Jim plucked the cigarette from his fingers, pressed it into his own mouth, and settled into bed.

"Tomorrow," he said casually, breathing out smoke and flicking ash into the china bowl, "smoking in the bedroom happens only after sex. Other than that, your arse is on the balcony. Unless you have somewhere else you have to be, in which case you can piss right off in the morning." Jim took a sultry drag of Sebastian's cigarette, and flashed his best fuck-me smile at him.

~

After the incessant built-up for days, after the crazy intensity of the last hours ... there was only one way left to go: down. At the moment it felt like drifting, sinking... peacefully. Beneath all that was... something he couldn't fathom yet, and didn't care to look at too closely. He knew adrenaline hangovers, post-battle euphoria, and post-coital bliss… sometimes on the way down you were suddenly tipped over and the normality you returned to felt bland and a little pointless.

But at the moment all was well, maybe because thinking was out of the question anyway (the food, on top of everything else, had seen to that). He just knew that right now he didn't have the faintest idea where this thing might go, or... what this thing even was.

He grinned, as he took another drag from his cigarette. God, Moran, you are an eejit, he chided himself. One moment, with that intoxicating little fucker balls deep inside you, you feel like the world's tilting on its axis and blowing up in a life-changing epiphany; half an hour later you're preparing yourself to be chucked back out into the cold again with only the souvenir of a big fucking M carved into your back. It might well be any of a million possibilities in between.

Nestling back into the propped-up pillow, he found himself not even flinching from the pain, but rather pressing against it a little bit. It felt grounding, in what was likely the aftermath of a glorious biochemical riot, triggered by an experience so insanely intense, his body had no frame of reference for it.

He had seen a good deal more of Jim Moriarty than most other people ever had, which didn't mean he had the slightest idea of what really went on inside the man. Or how he was supposed to work
with him, pretending he'd forgotten all that had happened (if that's what was required).

What he did know was that at the moment Jim - even though pointedly jibing, teasing, and ordering him around - had let him rest languidly in his bed and have a smoke, while he himself cleared away the dishes.

Sebastian smiled when Jim, as if on cue, came back, helped himself to his cigarette again, and started to tell him that tomorrow...

Which meant... Hang on...

Sebastian stirred a bit, because the way Jim laid down the law, went straight to his cock, which stirred a bit as well – talk about being obvious, for fuck's sake. He leaned back his head and willed himself to stop fidgeting- without his cigarette to busy his hands with. He propped himself up on one elbow.

“Well –“ he seemed to ponder the appointments in a fictional diary, “since I have a boss who's very understanding and gave me a day off tomorrow, no - I don't think I have anywhere else to be.” And god, if Jim continued to look at him like that he might end up doing something that would have him in restraints again in no time. “And not that the incentive of smoking in bed would have been necessary, but – much appreciated.”

~

“Oh! Good to know you don’t need an incentive to spend the day fucking,” Jim said, enjoying how Sebastian's eyes glazed over at that.

"I suspect your boss is more selfish than anything and doesn't have an understanding bone in his body...” he said conspiratorially. "Or so I've heard! Fucking psycho..." he said, and couldn’t stop himself from smirking. It was awfully tempting to just relax around Sebastian and that was something he'd have to guard against... but it was four in the morning, and there was barely any energy left for his usual controlled demeanor.

Jim hadn’t bothered to give the fag back, but when Sebastian reached out for it expectantly, Jim raised an eyebrow. “It really is a disgusting habit...." he remarked, took another drag, and handed it back to him.

~

Sebastian chuckled at Jim's little self-assessment, ending in an affirmative noise. “Yeah, so I've
heard. Honestly, must be quite tiring, isn’t it? To keep everyone convinced you are...? I mean – an even bigger one than you actually are...”

And therefore probably *not* okay with anyone else noticing. And even commenting on it. So Sebastian inconspicuously took himself a bit out of range of Jim by retrieving the water bottle from the floor beside the bed and taking a drink from it.

As for smoking being such a disgusting activity, Jim took part in it with relish, at least for the moment.

“I know”, Sebastian answered pleasantly and took the cigarette back, offering Jim the water bottle in return. “That's why I’m trying to keep you from getting hooked.” He grinned, took the last pull – that's all that was left anyway - and killed the stub beside its predecessor in the little china bowl.

~

After Sebastian's comment about being less of a psycho than everyone thought, Jim said nothing, only raised an eyebrow and regarded him in an assessing manner. As Sebastian leaned over to pick up the water bottle, Jim's eyes flashed. He nodded to himself and grinned fiercely. When Sebastian turned back to offer him the water bottle, Jim's face had returned to a neutral expression.

He sipped some water as Sebastian finished his cigarette and stubbed it out. When Sebastian deposited the posh little ashtray to the nightstand, Jim made his move.

He lunged at Sebastian, and slammed his hands onto the mattress on either side of his head.

"So - you think you know the secret to James Moriarty after one evening?” he murmured softly, fixing him with a hard stare. "After one fuck and some lovely afterglow? Because you saw me relax? I'll grant you it's not commonly *seen*, but it does happen, Sebastian. Of *course* it happens! But you know what else happens?” Jim smiled slowly. "A clever Tiger thinks he's so safe he can just say anything he likes. You can say whatever you *want*, honey - but then there are consequences to face... I haven't decided yet what they should be because yes, I'm bloody tired, Sebastian! It is *fucking tiring* being a psychopath and a criminal mastermind and then to top it off I was kept up half the night by the most stubborn fucking man... although it was so worth it, darling...” Jim gave him a feral smile.

"But *am* I less of a psycho than you thought? Or have I *convinced* you of that? Before you conclude I'm some adorable, fuzzy teddy bear variety of psychopath, remind yourself of what I chose to do to get you into bed. Instead of just propositioning you. And now that I have you here... *well*..." Jim's hands curled around Sebastian's wrists. "What did you think the journey *back* from the centre of the deep, dark woods would be like? With the wolf at your *back*? When he's had a taste of your *blood*?” Jim shook his head slowly, and his eyes gleamed. "Didn't think this through, did you?” he
whispered, and kissed Sebastian long and hard and possessively.

~

The shock jolted through Sebastian as harshly as the purely instinctive counterreaction he had to halt. The assessment of the appropriate degree of violence to unleash was barely ever a conscious decision - it functioned smoothly, if he could tune in on the situation, and a fraction of a second was all that took. But this, relaxed and unguarded as he was, had been a close shave.

Heart hammering in his throat he looked up at Jim. The nauseating relief that nearly paralysed him for a few seconds, was as much due to Jim not intending to inflict grievous bodily harm as to himself realising just that, in the nick of time.

Well – obviously what he'd said had gotten to him?

He knew just how tiny the glimpse was he'd caught behind the curtain. He also realised that he'd never been far away from the presumption he could figure out what was really behind it. You didn't build the kind of reputation Jim had, let alone a criminal empire, by merely pretending to be a dangerous psychopath - or, if you could do that, you were even more dangerous.

So he kept very still. Other reactions he could not influence, not as Jim leaned over him and closed his hands around his bandaged wrists, emphasising how big a delusion it would be, if Sebastian should think himself out of the woods yet. And then kissing him in a way that made his brain lurch and prepare to take leave again... He responded fiercely, but not fighting, and not questioning the rules of dominance being asserted again.

Finally, they both had to come up for breath again, eyes still locked. Bloody hell. This could have gone much worse, and Sebastian knew it. Instead, he'd just gotten a fair warning and been let off – once again. He did not even contemplate a snark, or quip.

For the moment, just one thing was necessary.

“Never,” he whispered, “Ever... Jump me like that again.”

~

Jim's eyes narrowed and assessed Sebastian's facial expression. He took in his voice and his body language and the trembling in his muscles. He did all this in a flash, which is how he managed to
tamp down first on perceiving his words as a threat, and then fury at being told what to do.

Because Jim understood that what was said was meant as a very critical piece of information, but he also did not take kindly to a) being given any kind of instruction

b) being seen as not the most lethal thing in the room.

The experience of stifling this upsurge of anger felt unsettlingly like a rattlesnake sucking venom back up through his fangs, and caused him to shiver as the darkness rippled through him and then took a moment to settle.

He glared throughout while this was happening, and then smiled slowly and gave a curt nod.

"Don't trigger the death machine - noted," he said lazily.

"And some friendly advice back to you - " He tilted his head. "How Jim Moriarty presents himself to the world is not what I would call safe territory - even for a dangerous killer such as yourself. So - don't go frolicking through minefields, darling... Even the deadliest soldier in the world isn’t a threat if he’s in pieces."

Jim slowly uncurled his hands from Sebastian's wrists and took his face in his hands. "The two of us in close proximity is rather like doing a tango in a pool of petrol while flicking a bloody lighter... It was a terrible idea from the beginning,” he said wryly. “But shall we hold off on fiery explosions and bloodshed for a bit longer? We only just started after all, Tiger..." His smirk faded and he stared at him intently, still holding his face.

"Don’t trigger the monster, Sebastian..." he whispered and licked his throat slowly.

~

For a moment, what would happen – or not – was in balance on a knife's edge. Something dark, hideous, and utterly deadly peered at Sebastian. Then it drew back, and he knew his warning had been received the way it was meant. It was not met with delighted appreciation, but also not misunderstood as a threat.

Then he received some advice as well. And yes, minefields he knew, so the reminder was absorbed and not taken lightly. Although the ghost of a smile curled the corners of his mouth at Jim’s analogy of the hazardous combination they made. Not a good idea?

“So you've said...” he breathed.
And yet – here they were. And they had only just started.

And it sent a shiver running through Sebastian's body, because this was a thousand times more intoxicating than fiery explosions and bloodshed, or anything else he could think of...

There was indeed a monster in the black inky depths of those eyes staring into his, and it had just stirred the tiniest bit and gone back to sleep... But if Sebastian wanted to live, he'd better never forget it was there...

The only audible answer was in his breath, briefly catching, and even after Jim had let go of his hands, he didn't move them. Jim's tongue seemed to create a slow-burning trail along his neck, and when it reached his jaw, Sebastian's whole body was arched with exquisite tension against Jim's. Just as slowly he had tilted his head back, pressing sweat-tousled hair into the pillow, and baring his throat.

~

Jim felt Sebastian's submission go through him like a wave, and he looked down at the proffered throat in a daze. He pressed his lips underneath Sebastian's jaw, and then bit down. Jim let out a low half-growl, half-moan as his tongue pressed against the tender flesh.

He pulled back and stared at Sebastian.

"Uh oh," he commented, taking Sebastian's hand and pressing it against his semi-erect cock. "We threaten each other and look what happens..." He pressed against Sebastian's hand, closed his eyes briefly and bit his lip.

His own hand slid down Sebastian's muscular abdomen and down to his cock, already hardening.

"Well, now what?" he asked. "We're both exhausted... we just got cleaned up... and it's after four in the morning. Clearly the smart move is to go to sleep and continue whenever we wake up."

Jim crawled over Sebastian in an instant and sat straddling him. "Is this all right? Or are you going to kill me?" he asked, his voice heavy with sarcasm. But his eyes sparked with desire, and he moved his erect cock against Sebastian's. Once again his eyes closed. His head dropped back, and he rocked his hips against Sebastian's slow and hard.
"Fuck," he whispered. "Fuck..."

Jim's eyes flew open and he stared down at his sniper. "Don't be ridiculous, Tiger - of course we should go to sleep..." he said breathily.

His hand firmly stroked up and down Sebastian's cock, and he licked his lips.

~

Sebastian felt the indescribable, gorgeous sound Jim made reverberating through every cell of his body, travelling down his spine, through his stomach, his cock, down to his toes, and up – bypassing the brain – to the roots of his hair...

Then he found his hand being put on Jim's cock. His amusement about the deadpan observation of the effect lethal threats seemed to have on both of them, dissipated into a sudden mind-blowing realisation....

The rules are fairly simple. Do as I say, darling.

Which meant not doing what had not been explicitly allowed, or even ordered.

But now this - the unspoken but unambiguous permission... to touch.

God. It was glorious – the silky heat, the weight of the hardening length, pressing into his palm... Sebastian let his fingers close around it almost reverently, giving a small squeeze, and a slow stroke, then taking possession more boldly. And just as much, he revelled in the look on Jim's face, exquisitely concentrating, dazed, just short of going into a trance...

But no, not quite. He returned the favour and came up with a whole unnerving array of reasons why they should be going to sleep now. Meanwhile... doing quite the opposite, straddling Sebastian, leaning forward, rocking against him with slow, intense movements.

“No, I am not going to kill you...” Sebastian breathed “Or... I just might, if you stop…”

That sound like a threat? Maybe he should draw a sign to hold up every time Jim might choose to perceive threats that weren't meant as such...

As to all these fucking sensible reasons...

His hand moved up Jim's side, as if he so could commit every inch of his skin to memory, and also... hold him in place, should he entertain the insane notion of moving away... and going to sleep.
“Well, we don't have anywhere to be tomorrow, and we *do* have a towel...” Sebastian's next breath turned into a moan, when Jim's hand returned to his cock. “And you have *me* to sleep on the messed up side of the bed...”

He trailed off, because the thought that he was meant to stay the night, let alone the next day, with Jim... completely messed with his head.

~

He was going to do it - climb off Sebastian and tell him to go to sleep. These were the types of head games Jim liked to play with his sex partners. And he was going to do it - in just a moment.

He placed his hands on either side of Sebastian's head and looked down at him intently. His hips rocked against Sebastian's, and their cocks pressed together.

He exhaled slowly.

This was *not at all* like it was with the others... Jim didn't get carried away. He didn't do things out of lust. He certainly didn't kiss, not like he had tonight.

Time to stop, Jimmy, he chided himself. Pull back... show him his place... and go to sleep.

Yes, that was sound, and the most strategic thing to do...

And he was so *fucking bored* of it all...

He wanted something more intense, more exciting, more challenging...

More, he thought to himself, and leaned down to kiss Sebastian.

His hand slipped back to Sebastian's cock.

He broke off from the kiss long enough to growl "Fucking touch me," and then his lips pressed against Sebastian's, and his tongue surged into his mouth.

~

So, not only *permission to touch*, but an order... (not that Jim would have to ask twice, or even once, for that matter).

“*Yes Sir...*” Sebastian replied softly, the inflection suggesting the tiniest trace of sarcasm. The warm
touch of his hand moving down Jim's back was also soft, then turned into a slight raking of fingernails. The grip of his other hand, sliding down that beautiful cock, tightened just enough to still remain on the good side of painful.

The noise that drew from Jim, and the fierce kiss descending on him felt like vengeance, like reprimand and assault and... reward at the same time. The longing and arousal sweeping through Sebastian defied description, especially considering the past few hours. Jim's body was breathtaking - hot and hard, and soft in just the right places, and Sebastian finally, finally had his hands on it... He made full use of that opportunity, that permission, which he had craved for hours (OK, weeks). And he also knew, after spending those hours under Jim's command, that permission could be revoked at any moment.

~

Jim nearly came undone at his touch... he never let anyone touch him ever except in the most controlled ways, like ordering someone to drop to their knees to deliver a blow job.

Which he was very much looking forward to doing to his soldier... but for right now, in this hazy time before dawn that was not quite today and not quite tomorrow, he wanted, needed hands on him for once - and the hands he wanted were Sebastian's. He would sort out tomorrow how he felt about it, and if need be, punishment would be swift, cruel and delicious.

When Sebastian's strong hand closed around his cock, and stroked, and squeezed, Jim's eyelids fluttered closed... God... he made a noise deep in his throat like he'd never heard before... but then, he'd never been touched like this before. His responding kiss was a hard, hungry retaliation, and Sebastian surrendered to it with a moan.

Fuck, Jim thought, fighting back panic. Wasn't this supposed to be out of my system, now...? And all this touching is very much against the rules, so I need to put a stop to it immediately...

But he felt his body move sinuously against Sebastian's hands, in defiance of his own orders, embodying the lust and desire and heat he was feeling building in him as he stroked and was stroked. He slid over Sebastian's skin like a serpent, and looked down at him with half-closed eyes.

"Fuck..." he panted, and began to stroke Sebastian's cock faster. "You won't - hear this often, Tiger - so don't get used to it - come with me..." he moaned.
To be the cause of Jim's eyes closing, of that racing pulse on the side of his neck, just beneath the skin... to draw this low, primal noise from his throat ... Jesus. The way his body ground against Sebastian, his hand quickening on his cock – all this was more than enough for Sebastian to lose it there and then...

And then ... those words, that one sentence, torn to ragged pieces by panting breaths – testimony of control slipping – from a man who probably never, ever let that happen.

...don't get used to it...

Sebastian doubted he would ever get used to this. Doubted there was anything about Jim he would ever get used to - except maybe this one certainty: never to get used to anything, or make assumptions, or think you knew what would come next.

There was no question it was Jim who had the lead, as he'd had all through the night. But as specifics hadn't been given, Sebastian took a few small liberties. Hanging on to the last thread of self-restraint, adding a little twist and a swipe of his fingers to the movement of his hand, he let Jim have just that: the lead. Because, as eager as he was to follow, he did not want to miss any of it: that delicious, shuddering halt, when all perception of the body instinctively, involuntarily turned inwards, the slight tremble of muscles, before tensing up... and maybe, again... that noise?

Sebastian's left hand had moved to the back of Jim's neck, fingers raking into the still damp hair as he arched himself up, his breath, his tongue, his teeth ghosting over the throbbing pulse beneath his jaw.

~

Even as he panted and stroked and moaned, Jim was thinking... Why had he said that?? Come with me? Jesus, that bordered on something romantic sweetie-pies would say to each other - not a criminal mastermind and his... Sniper? Soldier? Submissive? None of these really fit. He wasn't just his sniper, he was no longer a soldier, and as far as submissives went, Sebastian was the most defiant, mouthy one he'd ever had. He stared at him as they both panted and stroked each other. Jim couldn't help but smirk, and he received a grin in response. God, that smile...

A criminal mastermind and his Tiger, Jim thought through a haze of mounting desire, and moaned at the feeling of Sebastian's hand on his cock moving harder and faster.

God, and Jim had left Sebastian unrestrained and ordered him to touch him? What was he thinking? What was he going to do for an encore tomorrow, present his arse and ask Sebastian to fuck him? Steps would have to be taken to ensure his Tiger was very clear on the natural order of things...

But for the moment, Sebastian was being cautious and controlled with his touching, which Jim
approved of... and the touching was very good, and Sebastian's tongue under his jaw was having an unbelievable effect on him, as well as that thing he was doing with his hand, the twisting thing which was... oh god...

Jim groaned loudly, and thrust his cock into Sebastian's hand harder. He leaned down and kissed him. His kiss was hard and long and wet, and he moaned into Sebastian's mouth as he felt a shiver move through his muscles. "Oh god", Jim murmured into Sebastian's lips, and began to moan and shudder against him.

Jim unraveling under his hands, his mouth, was amazing, an experience so intense and beautiful, Sebastian felt a bit... drunk. Because it was far removed from what had happened before, and even further from the Jim Moriarty he'd seen since he'd first met him.

Don't get used to it

Sebastian knew that the defining foundations of whatever relationship this was going to be, had been laid during those hours in that other room, which had brought him, physically and literally, to his knees before this man. It seemed like things he didn't even know existed, had fallen into place ... Well, not exactly fallen easily but put into the place they belonged. Like pieces of a puzzle, forming a picture which you hadn't even had the imagination to visualize.

This now, was different. Like a throwback into the familiar, nearly into something... normal people would do, just... that it wouldn't be their 'normal'.

Don't get used to it

The smirk and the smile they exchanged seemed to be reminder and acknowledgement of that, and even in the thickening haze of arousal, Sebastian tried to soak up everything and commit it to memory. Every sensation, and every reaction from Jim, every soft curse and every sound of approval. The voracious, messy way Jim kissed when nearing the point of no return, his moan, and his hard, slightly irregular movements, when - he was there. There.

Sebastian, panting, half delirious under Jim's ministrations, barely hanging on to 'not yet', felt the delicious contractions under his hand, and then, that noise again from Jim's throat.

“Fuck...” he groaned, as he felt himself tipping over as well. Bucking, sliding against the wet heat between them, he came, his fingers digging hard into the back of Jim's neck.
Jim found himself in the most unfamiliar situation he had been in for years... the culmination of a sex act, in its simplest, purest form - no restraints, no power games, no domination or mindfucking... in short, no *armour*. This was a *fine* mess to be in...

What the *fuck*, Jimmy, he growled at himself...

Here he was hurtling towards an unbelievably hot orgasm, and there was *nothing* he could do about it. Couldn’t stop it, or even pull back and change the rules. It was almost upon him, and almost upon Sebastian as well, if his delicious moaning was anything to go by...

*God*, he thought - were they having simultaneous orgasms now?? What was next - afternoon picnics and moonlit strolls? He'd sooner slit both their throats, he thought furiously.

This thought was amusing and strangely comforting, and Jim found himself tumbling into rapture... he gasped and jerked violently against Sebastian’s hand, which never faltered... he exploded into pleasure, and cried out with the blinding, searing ecstasy of it. Dimly he could hear Sebastian cursing and groaning with pleasure.

*Fuckfuckfuck*...Jim fell back against the pillows, panting.

*God*... never again, he swore to himself, even as aftershocks of glowing pleasure burst through him, making his body shiver. He opened his eyes to see Sebastian in a similar state, sweaty, with mussed hair and struggling to catch his breath.

Jim looked down at his abdomen spattered white, his fingers wet and sticky with come. He sighed. “Well, that was a wasted shower,” he grumbled. “You can clean us both off.... since you just had to have one more orgasm before sleeping...” he smirked, and closed his eyes.
The last tremors running through his body and still catching his breath, Sebastian felt a blissed-out smile on his face.

Two simultaneous orgasms, delivered as ordered. And rather excellent ones if he might say so? Granted, one should only speak for oneself, but after all he'd seen and heard...

Jim slid off him, unceremoniously flopping to the side and into the pillow – he probably would not appreciate the fact that Sebastian found it absurdly endearing and human. And lest Jim sense this and feel compelled to go off on another rant how Sebastian shouldn't get any ideas, he looked at him just briefly, out of the corner of his eye.

Then he wriggled a bit, trying to get the towel out from underneath him without getting up, but quickly ceased the attempt, because as the euphoria receded, the pain of nicks and cuts and stiffening muscles – not to mention a voracious fuck - came back with a vengeance. He gingerly rolled onto his knees, took the towel, and wiped the evidence of their combined horniness and foolishness from Jim's stomach. At least for those few seconds he allowed himself to feast his eyes on the lean body sprawled out beside him in boneless content.

He was more amused than miffed to be treated like the perpetrator solely responsible for this renewed mess and the wasted shower.

“It wasn't wasted,” he hummed. “Now I know where the towels are.”

Getting up, he put the towel into Jim's hands and walked to the bathroom to get another one. He also remembered something he'd seen in one of the cabinets...

When he came back to the bedroom, he had cleaned himself up as well and brought three towels, putting one of them down to protect against further bloodstains on his side of the bed... (uhm, it was there already? Oh god, 'his side of the bed'… Don’t get any ideas, Moran…)

He'd also brought a small package. Repositioning himself on the bed, he tore it open.

“One of the most useful inventions of humankind,” he grinned and tossed the wet wipe onto Jim's stomach.

Eyes still closed, Jim felt Sebastian carefully wipe his abdomen clean. He could also sense Sebastian's eyes on him, which gave him a feeling of smug pleasure - he did so love to be admired, and Sebastian was given to staring at him like he was the most magnificent, beautiful creature he'd
ever seen - which of course would be the case.

Jim's eyes opened as he felt Sebastian getting up. A towel was placed into his hands, and Jim cleaned off the remaining semen from his hand and his cock, while watching that spectacular muscled arse walk to the bathroom.

Now he knows where the towels are, he thought lazily. Clever fucker... He found himself humming at the thought, and then stopped when he realized what he was doing.

We do not get cozy with employees, he reminded himself firmly. We do not get cozy with anyone.

A moment later, a spectacularly beautiful cock returned to the room. Jim stared at it with pleasure.

We do however make the best use of employees' skills and qualities, he thought with satisfaction.

Sebastian replaced the towel, and got back into bed and tossed a wet wipe at him.

Jim looked down at it and back at him, disbelievingly. "I thought I said to clean us both off?" he asked in a silky tone. "But maybe I asked you to throw cleaning supplies at me so I could do it myself... SO hard to remember! And I wouldn't get too comfortable yet... There's a used towel that needs to go into the laundry bin in the bathroom. And while you're up you can throw out the wet wipe and the packaging... Wastepaper bin is on my side. We don't leave rubbish lying around here... or dishes, or towels, or clothing. I would think as a former army man, you'd appreciate that..." he gestured at the wet wipe. "Be a doll and take care of it, former Colonel..."


Jim eyed the baby wipe on his abdomen and then... Sebastian.

Well, the dangerous creature living deep in the dark woods was satisfied and lazy, but definitely not asleep yet. Better not step on its tail...

"Well, it is awfully late, so..." 'it's easy to forget', Sebastian's amiable smile seemed to say.

"But if you want me to do the fine cleaning as well..." He moved closer, picked up the cool tissue and did just that, applying himself to the task with slow, smooth strokes, paying careful attention to the parts he especially liked...

Did they absolutely need to go to sleep? Because Sebastian was quite confident that, given a little time he could hold that off once more and... he smirked, dipping his head a bit. He was more than tempted to slowly run his tongue up that beautiful, now-soft cock and see were that might lead and... Jesus, he must be out of his mind or delirious with fatigue.
Finished with what he was doing, he balled up the wet wipe and launched it into the wastepaper bin. The package followed accordingly.

And lastly the towel, which needed to go into the laundry basket in the bathroom. Right. And if he didn't take care, in no time he would also be mending Jim's socks, polishing his furniture, and starching his shirts. Well, whatever had been established here this night, there were limits. Never mind tying him up, whipping, cutting and fucking him... but he would not be ordered around just because Jim enjoyed the hell out of being an obnoxious prick.

"Want me to wash it, dry it and maybe also do some cleaning while I'm up?" he asked sweetly. Settling back, he lobbed the towel towards the foot of the bed, then nudged it over the edge with his toes so it dropped out of sight. There: gone. Whoever got up to go to the bathroom next could take it with him.

~

Closing his eyes once more, Jim took great pleasure in the care Sebastian took with cleaning his skin... especially as Sebastian seemed to take extra pleasure and extra care with one particular area... for a moment, Jim thought his soldier was actually going to start sucking him off right then and there, and felt his lips curl up slightly.

His sly smile disappeared as he felt something being tossed over him and landing with a wet thunk in the wastepaper basket. His eyes flew open, just as the crinkly package sailed over him next and landed in the basket. He opened his mouth to speak, only to snap it shut when Sebastian made yet another snarky comment, threw the towel haphazardly and then shoved it to the floor with his foot.

Oh. No, you fucking don't, darling...

Jim's head swivelled towards Sebastian. A look of fury quickly melted into a vicious smile.

"What I want you to do is get up out of this bed, Sebastian. Either take that sweet arse to the bathroom and throw the towel where it belongs... or sashay it out the front door, and enjoy sleeping at home. Because if you can't handle tyranny, then tomorrow is not going to ring your bell..."

Jim's lips quirked, despite his irritation. "And here I thought you'd enjoy having your bell rung long and hard by an adorable despot..." Jim ran his tongue over his lips. "I didn't read you wrong... did I, Tiger..."

~

Jim's head turned, staring at him, and for a moment Sebastian stared back. He had seen, briefly, the fury and disbelief in Jim's eyes, just a flash of something very unpleasant stirring in their depths again. Then it drew back - was forced back - under deceptively smooth, dark velvet.
But a threat was made, and it wasn’t one Jim could – or would – go back on. Sebastian tried to
picture what would happen, if he just ignored it and went to sleep, and he realised, it wasn’t
something he was keen to find out. Not now, dog tired as he was… not after such a night, with that
pleasant ache humming in his bones. Not after what felt like had been carved in stone (or rather, into
his flesh) and yet... was still precariously unstable enough to blow up in his face... in both their faces.
He was still looking at Jim, and knew he had to decide if he wanted to risk it, for the sake of making
a statement.

“No, nothing wrong with a bit of delightful tyranny”, he quietly agreed. Something smouldered in
his eyes, and this time it was him, reining it back in. He furrowed his brows, slightly shaking his
head. “How obtuse of me to mistake it for commonplace prickery.” Then, with a brief grin and a
flash of teeth, he got up. “Glad it's not.”

He picked up the towel, took it to the bathroom and dumped it into the laundry basket, closing the lid
of the blasted thing with considerable force. And there it goes, Moran, he thought. You just dumped
your pride into the bloody thing as well. But hey, it's not as if you hadn't seen that coming from the
start, right?

He turned the tap, drank some water, splashed some in his face and when he had cooled down a bit,
walked back into the bedroom. He felt Jim's eyes on him the whole time, and as he wasn't in any
shape to nonchalantly flop down onto the bed again, he settled back into the sheets… carefully.

~

Jim stared hard at Sebastian as he considered his options. He was considering being stubborn, Jim
could tell... And there was no way in hell Jim was going to back down - but he also didn't believe for
a moment that he would be spending the night alone.

Someone like Sebastian does not smash through all the walls of resistance and defence to get to what
he wanted, willing to be carved up permanently, whipped bloody, soundly fucked, and face the fear
of death, only to balk at picking up a towel - even if he needed to act like a brat to save face, Jim
thought as his eyes glinted at Sebastian's words.

He reminded himself that it made sense that his soldier would feel the need to counterbalance the loss
of control he had faced at Jim's hands for the last few hours... culminating in the loss of pride at being
told to pick up a towel in the snarkiest way Jim could manage after four in the fecking morning. And
so, as Sebastian swaggered off with a sarcastic grin, Jim allowed the snarkiness to go unchecked - for
the moment. Because he also knew there was still work to do as far as Sebastian was concerned -
although last night had been an important first step, and had laid the foundation very nicely.

Jim heard the lid of the laundry bin bang down hard, and a smiled played on his lips.

Tomorrow further steps would need to be taken - if this was going to be anything more than a one-
time thing. Jim considered this with surprise as he waited for Sebastian to cool off and return. As he
listened to the water running, he realised he had never expected anyone to keep his interest and be
able to withstand his attention for more than a few evenings - and more often than not, things ended before the night was even done. He didn't know for certain if anything would continue with Sebastian after tomorrow, but - god knows he had never shared his bed with anyone before. And he found himself in the very strange position of wanting to see his face again - even if it had a snarky grin or anger smouldering in his eyes. In fact, he was wondering which it would be.

He watched as Sebastian appeared at the door - in fact it was neither snarkiness nor anger, but a show of nonchalance. A smile played on Jim's lips as Sebastian settled himself into bed.

God, the man was enormous... it was like having a Tiger in his bed, and Jim found himself wishing it was tomorrow already so he could strap him down, climb onto him, and see what other delicious noises he could get him to make.

He smiled sweetly at Sebastian. "Well, my dear - not that I'm not enjoying your charming company, but we have to sleep sometime... Reconvene in 6-8 hours, soldier... otherwise we're not going to accomplish anything of import tomorrow..." he said with an innocent expression. "Which I fully intend to do..."

He crossed his hands behind his head. "You may need more cigarettes, Tiger..."

~

With all of its signals being overridden so many times and in so many different ways, Sebastian's body had been pushed into that paradox state of hyperalert exhaustion he knew from being in the field. Sometimes operations could last for days - body, mind and nerves were incessantly overwrought and yet forced to function on the highest level... Afterwards the body needed a conscious effort to just... reset. All control circuits were just fried.

He looked at Jim and sensed the same overstrung exhaustion there - fatigue and desire, the sheer need to rest and the reluctance to do so.

As if, now that they were finally here together, it seemed nearly impossible – even just temporarily – to simply let go and sleep. Not before reassuring yourself you wouldn't miss anything, because when you woke up, you would, and could continue where you'd left off. Which was, beyond common sense and reason, exactly what Jim's words were hinting at.

And the thought of things to be accomplished tomorrow had Sebastian's stomach doing a thrilled little flip, not to mention other body parts that felt addressed as well ... Christ. He fidgeted a bit, finally turning to lie on his front – a totally inconspicuous manoeuvre, because this was probably the best – i.e. least uncomfortable – position to sleep in, right?

Nestling his cheek on his forearms he continued watching Jim, who'd now crossed his hands behind his head and pondered about Sebastian's stock of cigarettes. This of course set Sebastian's thoughts immediately off into the direction of where he'd be smoking them - he would of course be aiming to earn as many as possible in bed instead of skulking off to the balcony.
"Well... depends on how many you keep nicking, but I've got another pack in my jacket."

~

Jim was very focused on the unusual nature of having a man in his bed. And that he didn't know if he could sleep a wink with him here. And that he really needed sleep, but he was resisting even closing his eyes. He wasn't looking at Sebastian, just staring at the ceiling. But knowing he could if he wanted was satisfying. And ridiculous.

He was aware that Sebastian was looking at him - and that he liked to look at him as often as possible. This pleased Jim far more than it should have. He finally glanced over at Sebastian.

"I can't sleep. Get up," he said tersely.

Sebastian seemed alarmed for a moment, as if he thought he was being asked to leave. Jim sighed and sat up. "Jesus, Sebastian... I'm just going to step out onto the balcony for a minute... not everything needs to be a drama, does it?"

Jim got up and grabbed a black dressing gown from his cupboard, and left Sebastian to decide for himself if he would dress or appear naked on the balcony. Personally he hoped for the latter.

Jim slid open the door, and breathed in the cool air. He leaned his elbows on the ledge, and stared up at the night sky. There was a sound behind him, and then Sebastian appeared to his left. Jim looked him up and down, pleased, and then returned to looking at the sky.

"Do I need to mention again that this is not a fucking honeymoon?" he asked mildly. "We happen to have just fucked, and there just happen to be stars overhead. It's night-time - that's what happens at night, Sebastian. Well, it's almost dawn, actually. And we need to get some fucking sleep..."

Jim looked with annoyance out towards the city. "Out there, they're all tucked in their beds safe and sound. They have no idea what goes on in the darkness... So boring... but you and I aren't like that, are we? We're mad and bad and dangerous... and possibly delirious. Forget everything I just said. We will sleep now... back to bed, Tiger..." Jim looked at Sebastian, but didn't make a move to go back inside.

~

Sebastian doubted he'd sleep anytime soon, as long as there was Jim to watch, undisturbed: his stillness, with just the odd subtle movement; his profile as he gazed at the ceiling; the scar on his side, a few inches below his armpit, just a shade lighter than his skin, and now visible as he'd folded his
hands behind his back. *Knife.* But Sebastian didn't ask – the 'show me yours and I'll show you mine' part of the night was over, and at the moment he was content just looking...

*Wh...?!!*

He blinked, jolted out of his reverie, for a second not even grasping fully what Jim had said, then with the sinking feeling that he'd obviously changed his mind about him staying...

When he realised he'd gotten it wrong, he let his breath out, relaxing again.

He could practically see Jim rolling his eyes.

Right - he totally agreed: not everything needed to be a drama. (Really, how *could* anybody get that impression?!)

Sebastian kept watching for a bit as Jim wandered across the room and donned a black dressing gown, then he got up as well and followed him out onto the balcony.

There was a nip in the air, but it felt rather nice, soothing on his skin, scratched, cut, and chafed as it was. Not too keen on dragging anything over it, only to repeat the process a few minutes later in reverse, he hadn't bothered with clothes.

Jim seemed to approve, then he returned to looking at the ceiling, in this case, the sky. Actually, he didn't need to warn Sebastian – how many times now? - against falling prey to any romantic misconceptions, even though they'd just fucked, and were now standing beneath the stars. Sebastian slightly tilted his head back too.

This was the time when the city was as close to sleeping as it ever got. And like the low, throbbing hum of its heartbeat that never ceased, it also never really got dark. Only the brightest stars were visible, soon to fade before the encroaching dawn.

“*Well, there aren't that many...*” he offered reassuringly, “*so it's not too dangerous.*”

And the only moon in evidence was a smudgy, pewter-coloured disk, setting into the dusky mist behind the expanse of Hyde Park to the west of them, where the night sky was still deep and dark.

It didn't matter that of course in reality they weren't the only ones still awake.

Because standing out here and looking across the city, it certainly *felt* like it.

They were a world apart. From all of that... All of *them.*

Was Jim even aware that he'd said *'we'*?

Sebastian certainly was.
But for the moment the unwitting world was safe, because they really did have to sleep.

Jim looked at him, without giving the slightest indication of following his own advice. And for a split second, Sebastian just wanted to pull him close and kiss him... *Jesus bloody Christ!*

He turned, but waited until Jim had stepped back inside and then slid the door shut.

“You know... closing your eyes doesn't always work right away, but it's indispensable at *some* point...”

~

It's not too dangerous? Jim thought in response to Sebastian's snarky comment. Of course it's *dangerous*... it's the most dangerous thing there is! Jim felt rankled by his flippant attitude. But then as they watched the stars under the quiet London sky, Jim felt calmer - as he always did when he stared at the vast outreaches of a dark velvet sky.

A few moments later when he saw a gleam go through Sebastian's eyes, he felt even more rankled. Was he thinking of *kissing* him?? A small part of him thrilled at the thought - but this part of him was an *anarchist* and a *traitor*, and was not the one making the big decisions. *To Kiss or Not To Kiss* did *not* fall under the little fucker's jurisdiction.

What part of *not a fucking honeymoon* was Sebastian not understanding?? he thought, feeling vexed. But then the gleam in his eyes disappeared, and Sebastian turned around to head back inside. Jim felt relieved... and then strangely disappointed... and then irritated. But Sebastian didn't seem like he was going to turn back around, so Jim went through the door in a huff. His solider slide the door shut behind him, and locked it.

Jim rolled his eyes at yet another snarky comment. God, he was always at the ready for being a sarcastic fucker, wasn't he?

"Shut it, Tiger,” Jim said mildly as he headed into the bedroom. Suddenly he felt his eyelids drooping slightly - the night sky had worked its magic.

Jim slipped off his dressing gown, hung it on a hook in the cupboard, and then threw himself into bed, groaning.

"Four-thirty," he complained. "Well, I'm starting to feel it now... and I'll try your 'closing the eyes' trick, Sebastian... it never would have *occurred* to me!" he yawned. "Now - I'm turning off the light in thirty seconds, whether your arse is in this bed or not."

He stared at Sebastian as he quickly settled himself on the towel, and then Jim reached out a hand
and slowly pulled a light duvet over them. It seemed to take an eternity, and it nearly took Jim's breath away. I'm in bed with a man, I'm going to sleep with a man, he thought, his heart race increasing. God, I am delirious...

“Lights off,” he said tersely, they were blissfully plunged into darkness. Jim focused on breathing steadily.

"Sebastian..." he murmured.

"Mmm?" he heard, and he smiled faintly in the darkness.

"If you snore, I'll smother you with a pillow..." he said in a sleepy voice, and let his eyelids flutter shut.

~

Of course this wasn't a bloody honeymoon. Because otherwise it would have been difficult not to engage in wishful thinking, and to keep telling himself that there was no further significance and prospect in what had happened... what had felt like monumental shifts, like pieces falling into place, like bonds fastening that went far beyond shackles and chains...

So, Moran, you daft fucker, you better content yourself with what you got, and which, only a few days ago, would have been more than you'd even dared to imagine.

You got mindblowing sex.

You didn't get thrown out, but you got your very own fluffy towel to sleep on (like any good pet at the end of a day full of messy adventures), and you're even allowed into bed!

And then there's tomorrow... god, tomorrow.

So -

Shut it, Tiger.

Padding back to the bed, Sebastian smiled, then settled back onto his side cautiously but without dallying… looking back at Jim as he slowly pulled a duvet over both of them, as if...
Oh, shut it, Tiger.

And he did. After the automated *lights out* at an order from Jim, he turned into a prone position (one of the less painful ones) and his head to the left, facing Jim. He could hear him breathing, a slow rhythm that seemed to will them into sleep. After a while he could vaguely make out contours and shades again, as his eyes slowly adjusted to the dark.

Sebastian finally closed his eyes. He made a low humming noise in his throat when Jim murmured his name. Softly, drowsily...

Ah well, he’d nearly thought himself in the wrong bed, but no – only Jim could sound so sweet and innocent while threatening to kill you in your sleep.

“Nah... I don't snore lying on my front,” Sebastian muttered and there was a smile in his voice. He nestled the side of his head into the crook of his elbow, looking over to where Jim's hair was a pitch-black smudge on the pillow. “… and some batty bloke cut up my back.”

~

Jim made a huffing sound. One more impertinent comment for the road, he thought in annoyance.

*Batty bloke?*

*Jesus...*

“...Maybe you drove him to distraction,” he muttered. “Christ knows what will happen to you tomorrow...”

Jim pulled up the duvet to his chin, and turned towards the wall. *Don’t say* anything else, Jim...

“Also. I didn’t just randomly cut up your back,” he said in a lofty voice. ”I gave you a souvenir of a beautiful evening. Elegantly rendered. One of a fucking kind. Something to remember me by when you’re old and grey - of course you won’t *live that long* if the smart-arse comments continue at this rate...”

“Noted. Sweet dreams, Jim...” His voice was innocent, downright *cheery*. Not sounding at all concerned about death threats from the psychopath he was about to sleep next to.
“Fuck’s sake...” the psychopath said under his breath.

He shook his head, and then barely stifled a laugh. Sebastian was not amusing, he told himself firmly, it was just late... He would put an end to this boldness tomorrow.

He pictured Sebastian chained up, being whipped into submission, once again pleading for what he desired... Jim found himself smiling with pleasure at the memory. It had been the most sublime sexual experience Jim had ever had... and he was bound and determined to see if it could be repeated... or preferably, surpassed.

All he had to was not kill Sebastian tomorrow, and he would wring every bit of pleasure from both of their bodies - until Sebastian was howling for release - then all this madness would be out of his system, and he wouldn't have to put up with this nonsense and impudence for much longer... maybe just when the mood struck. Yes... he’d be able to handle it once in a blue moon... No question.

Satisfied, Jim allowed himself to release his iron-clad control, and felt himself drifting off into blackness.

~

As he'd said: he'd just ignore it – that small, but disturbingly miserable twinge at the thought of all this probably being just a one-off. If at any stage tonight it had felt... different, it had been under the influence of whatever mind-altering drugs his body had flooded itself with. But now he knew better, and had come to terms with it, hadn't he?

He made a small noise, sounding relaxed rather than alarmed at the prediction he might never get to the future to reminisce about a particular scar he'd received ages ago. There were a multitude of reasons for that in his life. Going by Sebastian's tone of voice wishing Jim a Good Night, he didn't think a snarky disposition was top of the list.

He smiled at the soft expletive from the other side of the bed. Sinking into exhaustion, laced with the afterglow of release and the dulled and strangely pleasant throb of pain, he started drifting off.

Not five minutes later, Sebastian Moran, who usually got out of the bed of his conquests in the same timely manner as he got in, because it might not be safe to stay - was sleeping like a log. Next to the most dangerous and unpredictable psychopath in London.

The darkness centered around an enticing glow of warmth, blissfully permeating his body... he felt drawn to it, tempted to curl around it... It smelt good, too - a whiff of Earl Grey, the pristine scent of the night wind, a fire, and a taste of spicy dark chocolate ...

Except it wasn't dark anymore, as he realised gradually. Even more slowly he opened one eye, just the tiniest crack, very cautiously. Closed the eye. Opened both.
The back of a head, raven hair, sticking up in wild angles. Delicate, sharp lines: the curve of a neck, sweeping up to the shoulder, straightening out just below the ear. Between the knobs of two vertebrae a small mole - no, more, very tiny ones...

Good god. Sebastian froze as if he'd just felt that spine-chilling chink under one foot that meant you were a split second away from being blown to bits.

'Don't go frolicking through minefields...'

Without moving, without even breathing, he very carefully checked the position of each of his limbs. Right hand: buried beneath the pillow. Good. Left one - clear as well. Right leg: innocuously stretched out. Left: that's were the problem started (hooked over a sharp-edged bony ankle, which wasn't his own), but they didn't end there. He tried to wrench his mind away from panicky reasoning why Jim might not recognize a delightful length of morning wood nesting against his thigh for what it was – well, for one, he was surely still fast asleep… Please?!

Very slowly he eased his leg off Jim's and started to inch backwards. Thinking of an American sniper legend who'd crawled through enemy lines at what amounted to about ten inches per minute. Which he deemed an applicable speed for exfiltration under given circumstances.

~

Light creeping out from under the drapes... the sound of breathing (?)... the feeling of warmth on his leg, and something hard on his thigh (???)... Blinding panic flashed through him, and in an instant, Jim had whipped around to grab the throat of the soon-to-be-dead-man in his fucking bedroom. A hand clamped onto his wrist with an iron grip just as Jim's hand was closing hard around the throat in question. Jim and his assailant stared at each other hard, eyes wide, breathing quickly.

"Sebastian??" Jim barked. "What the fuck - "

Gritting his teeth, he released his fingers from Sebastian's throat - then jerked his hand out of the soldier's grip as if he'd been burned.

"What are you still doing here??" he demanded, his eyes filling with fury. Sebastian's mouth opened, and Jim raised his hand up.

"Shut up! I remember! I said you could stay... But I didn't expect to wake up with you practically inside me... Jesus..."

He covered his face with a hand, trying to breathe steadily. After a moment, he lowered his hand and glared at Sebastian. "Well! That was a bracing start to the day! Planning any other fun little
He rolled over onto his back and closed his eyes. "How are you at making breakfast?" he grumbled.

~

Even wide awake and alert as Sebastian was, the lightning speed of Jim's response and the viciousness with which he went straight for his throat – and got to it - was alarming. His own hand shot forward, clamping down, fingers digging hard into the nerves and tendons on the inside of Jim's wrist, but he managed to suppress a violent knee-jerk reaction (literally) with the potential to upset the plans for the day... considerably.

The snarl and the nearly demented rage (panic?) in Jim's eyes, and the question of what he was still doing here, had Sebastian convinced – at least for a second – that the man was completely off his rocker. (And why - as this was exactly what everybody said about Jim Moriarty - did that surprise him? Because last night he'd happened to see a temporarily mellowed version, due to the effects of fucking and fatigue?)

Heart racing in his throat, he stared up at him.

“You'd said…” he started, with a slightly hoarse voice, but was interrupted. Ah, he did remember.

They had released each other and Sebastian rolled away a bit, re-establishing some distance between them – as he'd intended to from the moment he'd woken up – if Jim had just let him.

“No, nothing in particular,” he stated evenly in answer to what else he'd planned. “And this wasn't, either.” He eyed Jim cautiously, who now lay on his back and looked a bit more composed, but still a bit put out too. “Sorry.”

And now, since they were both obviously awake - breakfast?

Getting served in bed by the master of the house apparently was a privilege of the first night which expired by next morning.

“I get along,” he answered cautiously. Not sure if that met the standards of Chez Moriarty, but – “it depends on what's in the fridge.” Really - bacon and eggs wasn't wizardry.

~

"I'll show you the kitchen in a moment... you can peruse the fridge all you like. I want to look at your
Sebastian obliged and started getting up.

"Lights on," Jim said crisply, and the room flooded with light.

Jim blinked at the clock - 10 AM. Christ, they'd had no more than five hours of sleep... Well, there would be time enough for a nap later... Jim considered this, as he got up and stared at Sebastian wandering over to the bathroom... he had been looking forward to a debauched day, and it felt like they had already started off on the wrong foot. Which was a completely bizarre concept to Jim, but - he had to admit, last night things had gone swimmingly.

In the bathroom, he removed the bandage and looked closely at the M.

"Well, it's nothing much to admire now... it's scabbed over, as expected. But it's not showing any signs of infection. It should be monitored over the next few days, and your bandage should be changed... as I'm sure you'll know. I'll take care of it," Jim said firmly. "I want to be sure my handiwork heals well... it's going to be bloody gorgeous."

He did the bandage changing with ease, and taped it up. He gazed at Sebastian's back, his hand moving firmly down the raised red marks from the whipping. Sebastian shivered, and Jim smiled in response...

Jim moved his tongue along one of the welts and nibbled his skin, stopping when Sebastian made a sound in his throat.

"It wasn't planned... sorry..." he said in a breezy voice. "All done! Shall we take a tour of the kitchen?"

Jim smacked Sebastian's arse and left to put on his dressing gown. He was disappointed to see Sebastian putting on his trousers, and was just about to say something about it... but it made sense if he was going to fry up breakfast. As long as it was temporary, he thought as he went downstairs, Sebastian trailing behind him.

In the kitchen, Jim went to the fridge and Sebastian joined him. Jim grabbed him and pushed him against the shiny chrome door. He kissed him hard, holding his hands against the cool metal.

"This is the refrigerator," he whispered. "Stove is to your right. Pantry to your left. Tour over. I look forward to seeing what you concoct..." Jim let him go, wandered over to the kitchen table, and plunked himself down in a chair. He fiddled with a laptop, and glanced up to see Sebastian pawing through the fridge. He had the strangest feeling it could be the first time of many and felt momentarily panicked, and then nearly dizzy with pleasure at the thought. He shook his head in a daze, and opened up a messaging forum.
Jim's voice command had everything functioning just as desired – the lights going on, Sebastian getting up… He wondered what else in this flat worked just like that – the whole bloody thing cleaning itself? (It certainly looked spotless…)

The tension had eased a bit and with the wild onslaught of adrenaline receding, Sebastian uttered a soft grunt when getting out of bed, because - holy fuck, he felt like he’d been run over by a freight train. But he also knew it would get better once he started moving around, so – first things first.

Sitting on the laundry basket in the bathroom, back turned to Jim, it was a strange and entrancing sensation, giving himself over to the same hands that had inflicted the injury, which were now tending to it with the same concentration and focus.

At the verdict of how the wound was looking, he just nodded. Under the new bandage he felt the familiar stinging tension of torn flesh and skin, starting to knit, but not the feverish throb of infection. Slowly and suggestively Jim's fingers traced the burning welts of the whip marks, with just enough pressure that made it hard not to flinch from the pain, while the lick and bite transformed into heat that washed straight through his core and... southwards.

The sound Sebastian tried to swallow was half protest, half plea for more.

'Not planned', my arse...! Which, for good measure, received a resounding smack as he got up from his basket.

Jim sauntered back into the bedroom. While he put on his plushy dressing gown, Sebastian grabbed the opportunity to get into his trousers, fully aware this hadn't been ordered nor allowed. But he had been demoted from sex to kitchen slave, and if Jim harboured the notion of putting him into an apron, then...

Oh bugger...

Maybe he should have given that decision a bit more thought and thrown the rest of his dignity out the window - chafing against the denim of his jeans every cut, scratch and welt on his arse and thighs made itself known with glowing vengeance. Probably exactly the reason why Jim had let him get away with it.

Grimacing, he trailed after him, down the stairs and into the kitchen. Where Jim suddenly rounded on him, and Sebastian yelped, as he found himself pressed against the cold door of the big fridge. Listening to Jim's instructions, he started to find the cool metal quite soothing and decided to just be grateful it hadn't been the stove he'd been backed into.

While Jim sat down and immersed himself in something on his laptop, Sebastian looked around the
kitchen. Twice he opened his mouth to ask something, but then thought better of it. He actually enjoyed finding his way around the luxurious kitchen, although he didn't even know what half the implements were. And he bet Jim didn't know either. The kitchen was clearly state of the art, but it looked largely … unused. Jim likely didn't have the first clue where the frying pans were, any more than he did.

“Who's stocking your fridge?” he asked. Everything you could think of needing seemed to be there.

When Jim wanted to know why he'd asked, sounding rather prickly, Sebastian made a placating gesture. “Just curious. Can't picture you scouring the aisles of Harrod's food court with a trolley...,” he said with a half grin, while taking out milk and butter, eggs and bacon, and some other things from the pantry. Although he was quite sure Jim would be as fastidious and picky with food as with anything else, he decided to assume that he'd eat whatever was in stock. Regardless if he did the shopping himself or not.

He put the kettle on, then he scrutinized the machine that seemed to be able to make at least a dozen different variations of coffee. He found the button that promised a no-frills Americano and, putting a mug under it, the theory proved correct.

“Want one, too?“ he asked, taking a sip, before returning to chopping an onion. The bacon was already sizzling in the pan.

~

Jim looked up from the laptop. "You made yourself one first, then offered me one?" he asked in a pointed tone, before returning his gaze to the screen. "Hardly a best practice for an employee, or... other categories," he said absentmindedly. "Lambeth was rescheduled to later in the week. Tomorrow will be an easy day..." he trailed off, and got lost in work.

Until he smelled something wonderful, and sniffed the air like a cartoon cat. He didn't know how much time had passed... (hadn't checked the time when he started... how strange!) just that enough time had passed for Sebastian to create the mouthwatering smells of breakfast.

"That smells good..." he remarked, and looked up.

He didn't usually have midnight snacks and home-made breakfast... but right now he found himself ravenous... and there was an ex-soldier frying up eggs and bacon for him, making the kitchen smell delicious, and handing him an Americano with an exaggerated gallant gesture, like a fawning servant to a King.

Jim bit back a reply, took the Americano and had a long, slow sip.
"Mmm... well, if security and assassination don't work out, you could always be a barista," he said innocently. "I'll start taking my laptop to your cafe. Pretending to write a crime novel while I'm engaging in mischief like blowing up an embassy remotely. Then I could shoot you a look before going to the toilets. Will he get the hint? Stay tuned!" Jim continued to sip his Americano, while eying a half-naked Sebastian preparing food.

The joke scenario would _never happen_, Jim thought... partly because it was far too distracting to get any work done while Sebastian was in the room. And partly because it was slowly dawning on Jim that he would never let him go in this capacity. _His_ security... _His_ assassin, he thought, and shivered.

—

'… other categories'? Of course, he _was_ very versatile...

“Strictly for security reasons...” Sebastian put another mug under the machine and hit the button a second time. Every emperor needed a cup-bearer, surely? Making sure nobody had fiddled with his coffee beans. And for the moment the mesmerising little Caligula seemed absorbed enough by his laptop to let this little slip in etiquette go.

And work had been rescheduled so they'd have an easy day tomorrow. Well, now that he _knew_ why a night with Jim warranted a day off, he wondered whether after that day he maybe needed a _week_... He turned the sizzling bacon.

Smells good? Looking up and catching a glimpse of Jim raising his nose into the air, he grinned, picked up the now-filled mug from under the machine and handed it to him, before cracking open the eggs into the second frying pan. _Christ_- listening to the little barista fantasy he was feeling all hot and bothered again in no time – and it was not due to the stove...

“Well, I can always start saving up for my own little café – just in case.”

Which was, basically, a horrible idea. The sexy regular with the laptop would be the only thing that kept him from shooting himself after a week.

He made toast and also a pot of tea, then started to put things on the table, encroaching on said laptop. Until finally it was snapped shut and put away, when he brought over the two plates with bacon and eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, and sausage.

“Well, I hope it's worthy of a fine establishment like _Chez Moriarty_”, he said, sitting down, surveying the table.
Breakfast did smell heavenly… His own stomach agreed with a rumble, as the little well past-midnight snack had been delicious, but ages ago...

“Although I'm not sure about the full five stars on Trip Advisor. Wasn't advertised as self-catering...”

Before Jim could say anything, he gave him a big toothy grin, picked up his glass of orange juice and raised it to Jim, before downing half of it in one go.

~

A plate full of delicious-looking breakfast landed in front of Jim with a thump. No finesse, but he couldn't wait to tuck in.

He watched as Sebastian threw himself in a chair, saluted him with a glass of juice and threw half of it back in one gulp.

Jim's mouth opened, then he shut it with a snap.

"Worthy of Chez Moriarty... that remains to be seen... but I thought we had an understanding about the full five stars," he said loftily. "Don't you know how I feel about renegotiating agreements?"

He pushed a forkful of eggs and bacon into his mouth, followed by a bite of toast. His eyes closed as he chewed.

"Yes. Worthy," he said simply, and poured himself some tea. He added milk and several spoonfuls of sugar, and had a sip before returning to the breakfast, confirmed as delicious.

The majority of the meal they spent in silence - a comfortable kind of silence that seemed like it did not need to be filled with small talk or inane chatter. It appeared Sebastian knew how to be quiet in a quiet moment, without it being a big issue.

Jim sighed with pleasure as he finished his breakfast, and pushed back the plate. He poured himself another cup of tea, then looked up at Sebastian watching him.

Was he supposed to offer -?

"Tea?" he asked, and when he received a nod and a thank you, he then enquired how Sebastian took his tea? It was as domestic as they could get without discussing needing a new dishwasher, and
planning a dinner party.

Jim smiled into his cup. Well, he'd just have to make sure things stayed edgy today.

"Breakfast was delicious, Sebastian..." Jim said graciously. "I'm just going to finish up with my work, and then - we'll just see what we feel like doing today, won't we?" he asked in an innocent voice. He took the laptop from the chair, and opened it up again.

"Sebastian... just out of curiosity..." he said, staring at the screen. "Your jeans... are they comfortable?" he asked, fluttering his eyelashes.

~

Renegotiating agreements. Right. "Uhm – now that you mention it–" Sebastian paused, grating pepper from the mill onto his eggs. "I do remember. Five stars it is", he conceded. With a bit of apprehension, he watched then smiled when a blissful expression crossed Jim's face at the first bite. The verdict was favourable, and Sebastian, returning his eyes to his own plate, dug in as well.

They didn't talk much while savouring their meal, and it didn't feel strange. Sebastian finished off his breakfast with several pieces of toast with jam, one of which nearly fell from his hand when Jim poured him tea and even asked how he wanted it.


It was downright silly to feel positively glowing at the simple praise for an equally simple accomplishment like making breakfast, but - there it was.

He felt a tingle of excitement as well as laughter tickling his throat, because Jim pondering the possible prospects of the day half sounded like the darkest and most delicious prospect, and half like contemplating just going to the Zoo or a park... Then he returned to his laptop, unfazed and in the middle of crumbs and empty plates. It dawned on Sebastian to whom it would fall – of course – to clear all this away.

“Right, I'm going to...” he made a vague gesture at the battlefield, “just need a fag first.” About to turn for the stairs an... exceedingly casual question stopped him in his tracks – whether his jeans were comfortable? And very likely the reason was not Jim contemplating a shopping spree.

“Well, not quite as much as they usually are.” Jim hadn't even looked up. “But it's okay... really...” Sebastian trailed off.
"Oh," Jim said - again with an innocent voice. "You look uncomfortable... Don't feel you have to stand on formality... if you'd rather be in nothing at all... have at it, darling." He grinned at Sebastian, and returned to staring his laptop.

Jim just wanted to get work out of the way so he could go back to doing things to his soldier... Jim thought back to last night when they - mmmm. He felt his cock twitch.

Yes, yes, he thought scathingly - *You find the beautiful soldier hot... A little dignity, Jimmy...*

He watched Sebastian as he went upstairs for his smoke. Jim felt strangely bereft - like he'd been left behind during a school trip. But he didn't think it made sense to go up with Sebastian, when he'd just said he would be doing some work. He tapped away on his keyboard, feeling disgruntled. When Sebastian reappeared (finally!), Jim straightened up, but shifted his expression to looking bored. As soon as the mess from breakfast was cleaned away and they'd had some time to digest, they were going back upstairs. And their day off (and Sebastian's training) would truly begin.

Standing on the balcony, Sebastian tried *not* to take too close a look at what he was doing here. Or maybe the next thing he would need might be a shrink, dealing with a full-blown identity crisis, sexually and otherwise... Would he?

Going over the events of last night, he took a drag from his cigarette, thinking of that man down there in the kitchen, who was pushing his buttons (most of which he hadn't even known he *had*) with such ease, and he simply – let him. No, more than that – he *craved* him doing it, as if they'd been hidden until... until he'd come along and found them. *Jesus Christ, Moran... how low can one sink*?!

He exhaled smoke and found that the only thing that bothered him about it was the fact that... it didn't.

The fact that he couldn't even *imagine* going back to what had been... before. Before that *one* night?! But it didn't feel as if it had started there - not last night, but much earlier...

*God*, and now he didn't even seem to be able to enjoy a solitary cigarette as much as when Jim was around, scrouring his smokes off him... He stubbed out the rest of it, flicked the end into the wind and went back inside.

When he came back downstairs, he wasn't wearing his jeans any more, just boxer briefs.
Well, he might have gotten sucked into all this deeply enough already to not even question the household chores falling to him, but certainly not enough to go dangling about in the kitchen without a stitch on.

Starting to clear away the remnants of breakfast, he grinned as he stacked plates and mugs into the dishwasher. The centre of the web of one of the mightiest criminal empires on earth looked deceptively peaceful and mundane at the moment: a small man in a black dressing gown, with somewhat dishevelled hair, hacking away at his laptop at a messy breakfast table.

~

Jim noted with satisfaction that the jeans were off... he could have done without the boxer briefs, but he would be seeing Sebastian in his naked glory soon enough. He typed away on his keyboard, replying to messages, forwarding instructions, sending orders... business as usual. The web shimmered out in multiple directions, branched off even more, and created the most exquisite patterns. Jim considered it a living mandala, and traced it out in his mind on a regular basis. It kept his mind in peak condition and his mind map in perfect order. Jim would pluck the threads and shiver as he heard the most beautiful reverberations throughout the web.

This is what he was doing now - idly plucking threads, just to see...

When Sebastian started collecting dishes, Jim smirked at the screen. This had worked out rather well, he thought. Originally, he was going to do his work in the living room, but it was far more pleasurable to feel Sebastian's eyes drinking Jim in when he walked into the kitchen.... flicking over Jim as he collected dishware... stealing glances from the dishwasher. Jim did not react to his observation, only innocently continued to order deaths, plan heists and organize kidnappings.

"Always so much to do!" he grumbled with pleasure. "The world doesn't stop its bloody spinning... but we'll make sure to have a lovely day, won't we..."

When Sebastian finished up, Jim picked his laptop up and headed to the living room.

"More of your wonderful coffee, Tiger?" he called back, yawning. In the living room, he got comfortable on the sofa and sent a message to Steve. Idly he considered ordering a new top-of-the-line motorcycle for Sebastian... but he suspected there would be manly fluttering about not being a whore. Fine, he thought and sighed. Be ungracious, Tiger! Another time, if I'm still feeling generous...

"Would have been a lovely gesture," he muttered, back to feeling disgruntled.
When another Americano was placed in his hands, Jim sighed and took it. "Thank you, Tiger," he said, pointedly. "Now entertain yourself for a bit longer... You like to read, don’t you? Check out the library if you wish. I won’t be too long..."

~

When the kitchen had been returned to its previous, near impeccable state, Jim and laptop relocated to the living room.

If last night hadn’t been so vividly scorched into his memory, by now Sebastian might have believed himself to be here on probation for yet another position - butler or housekeeper. But he was too cautious to object (and also, after the big breakfast, still feeling content rather than reticent).

And so he agreed to Jim's very polite suggestion to make him another coffee with only a slight hint of self-mockery.

“Coming right up, Sir.”

The living room – surprisingly homely for half an acre of ground dotted with seating furniture – had Sebastian wondering whether Jim alternately used all the sofas, settees and armchairs himself, or if he did indeed entertain guests on occasion. He couldn't picture the latter, because for many obvious reasons, the man seemed quite the recluse.

“Come again?” Sebastian handed one of the two coffees he'd brought with him to Jim, ensconced on a sofa, tetchily grumbling something - after he'd appeared positively cheerful just a few seconds ago... But then he thanked him and Sebastian just gave a shrug – which he'd learned to be the best course of action with Jim sometimes (provided you took care to not let him see it).

He then duly set about entertaining himself. Sitting down in a big armchair, sipping his own coffee, he started perusing the pile of very eclectic reading material on the low table in front of him.

He found he didn't much care for the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, but there was also Sun Tzu’s brilliant *Art of War*. Stephen Hawking's *Grand Design* was heavily annotated with scribblings in fine black marker, with passages underlined, margins filled with (rather unflattering) comments, and some pages appeared literally ravaged by corrections, with entire paragraphs crossed out. Not that Sebastian could have followed, or even attempted it... *Under The Knife* seemed to promise more comprehensive reading and Sebastian flipped through what turned out to be an engrossing history of early surgery, but found his fascination waning rapidly at the chapter about a fatal castration. Gingerly he put the book back, tucking it away under a dainty pink volume of Maria Pergay's sketches of French designer furniture.

He finished his coffee, stood up and started snooping around a bit, but inconspicuously keeping tabs on the occupant of the sofa, who, for now, still seemed to be working.
Assuming any closed doors to be out of bounds, and open ones not, he found the downstairs bathroom, then a den full of state-of-the-art surveillance monitors and computers, and the library...

~

Jim hid the fact that he was observing Sebastian as he perused his decidedly quirky coffee table books. He had enjoyed assembling the collection, after making a list of a hundred books to choose from... and then shortlisting them down to five. That was a fun, satisfying day. The only thing was, Jim never had anyone in his flat, unless it was to clean, or drop off the catering order, or do repairs and maintenance... so if they did look at the books, he wasn't generally around to watch their reactions.

It was just as fulfilling to see someone's reaction as to choose the books in the first place.

Sebastian seemed disturbed by Hieronymus Bosch (was Jim alone in finding his work hysterically funny??)... he admired the Art of War, seemed amused by Jim's notes about Hawking’s theories in Grand Design, was first fascinated and then repelled by the history of surgery, and he could not give a flying fuck about designer furniture. More delicious Sebastian-related information to be filed in his mind map...

and then his soldier was off like a shot, wandering down the hall. Jim assumed he was smart enough to play it safe, and did not shout a warning at Sebastian about staying away from closed doors.

Just look at how he was growing as a person... Jim thought Sebastian should be very appreciative of this, and resolved to find a way to tell him so.

Besides, a warning would have felt too much like something from Bluebeard's Castle... as well as Jim not storing bodies at home like an amateur, Sebastian was not his sweet young wife... and Jim was fresh out of bleeding keys.

He wondered what Sebastian was looking at now - was he in the library? or elsewhere like a naughty minx? Jim couldn't focus for one moment more on work. He snapped his laptop shut. Stood up. Walked fluidly and noiselessly down the hall, listening for movement.

*Here, Tiger Tiger Tiger...*
Who Said Tigers Can't Be Trained?

"Sunday 14th December... last night we were all cock-a-hoop, thinking ourselves fine fellows, and that all we now had to do was walk around and burn some villages; and within twenty-four hours we are locked up, closely besieged, after a jolly good licking"

Christ – it hadn't been that different a hundred years ago, had it? With a soft chuckle Sebastian closed the book and put it down on the low table near the window. It was cloth-bound in faded red – the private letters of one Capt. Boyce A. Combe, sent home to his brother from Afghanistan between 1878 and 1880.

He didn't put it back in its place (for which he might be in for a scolding, but that didn't disturb him too much), hoping he'd have the opportunity to come back and read it.

He'd found it while idly picking through one of the numerous shelves dedicated to military history (which he'd found surprising only at first, because who else would Jim find worth studying if not Nero, Caesar and Napoleon?)

But the whole library was magnificent - dark, gleaming shelves and cabinets as high as the ceiling, and a cozy seating arrangement by the window – and Sebastian marvelled at it. Not least because it belonged to a man who he'd have pegged as someone much preferring e-books to paper, dust jackets and leather. But also because it struck him that, to varying degree, just about any topic and field of knowledge seemed to be present...

~

Jim's eyes swung to the closed door of his study as he approached... then he heard pages being flipped in the library. He smiled and continued down the hallway noiselessly.

He stood in the doorway for a moment, observing Seb as he perused his shelves. Well, he knew his soldier had studied at Eton and Oxford, so it wasn't completely surprising. And his surveillance team had of course submitted a report with details of the apartment, right down to the titles of his books. An interesting mix of lofty literature (past and present), non-fiction (mainly history, biographies, and psychology), as well as a mix of fictional genres such as spy novels, historical fiction, and action/adventure.

Jim watched with amusement as Sebastian, wearing only underwear, hinged at his waist, and leaned down to read the titles of oversized books on a bottom shelf. He was practically hanging upside down while he read, and Jim decided this was the perfect time to let Seb know he was ready - and waiting.

"All done, Tiger!" he shouted cheerily.
Sebastian shot up, banging his head on a shelf as he came up. He stood in the middle of the library, in his boxer briefs, rubbing his head and looking bemused.

Jim laughed with delight. "Oh no!" he said with mock concern. "You didn't hear me stalking you? Do be careful, Sebastian... this is a death trap for the unwary," he whispered in a sinister voice, then grinned at him slyly. "I'm sure you'll be just fine... well-trained soldier like you. Now come along, Sebastian... the library won't be going anywhere..."

And neither will you, he thought and stifled a peal of laughter.

~

*Oh, the sneaky little bugger!*

Sebastian had been so immersed in all the treasures here, that it needed that thump on the head to bring back what had temporarily slipped his mind – that it was not advisable to ever be off your guard with Jim.

Sane reasoning told him he was quite safe. Or would Jim feed him a good breakfast, after disinfecting and bandaging his wounds, if he intended to add him to a collection of bodies beneath the floorboards? Then again - what was sane reasoning when it came to Jim Moriarty? He might not even have any fixed intentions, but just decide on the spur of the moment.

Normally Sebastian would rely on his instincts – no panic in that department either - but what if they were thrown off too, by other, equally primal mechanisms?

It didn't matter, because reason and even instincts took their collective leave in the face of that seductive playfulness flickering in Jim's eyes, that voice, full of threats and promises... It made Sebastian's stomach flip, his brain short out, and his cock twitch.

And he came along, as inevitably as he had last night.

~

Jim turned and walked down the hall with the utmost confidence that Sebastian would follow. When he heard footfalls behind him, he grinned. He walked up the stairs slowly but surely, his hand sweeping along the bannister.

In the upstairs hallway, he peeled off to the right - the side with the playroom. He turned to give him a wink before disappearing into the playroom.
Where he waited by the bed until Sebastian appeared in the doorway.

"Welcome back, darling..." he said in a lazy voice.

"You'll notice I changed the sheets... didn't hear me go upstairs and back down again, did you? My, you must have been transfixed by my books..." Jim moved towards Sebastian.

"Let's see if we can get your mind onto something other than reading... you remember the rules, I suppose? Good. Then... as you were, soldier. Stand in front of the same piece of equipment..."

Jim noted as Sebastian hesitated before standing as directed. Jim circled him, observing. "I'll go easy wherever you're wounded," he said wryly. "Wrists."

Sebastian held out his hands, eyeing him... Jim eyed him back as he shackled his wrists and placed them into position above his head. He gave him a slow, wicked smile.

"Well, you're in for it, now... all those snarky things you like to say, Sebastian? Here's where you pay for being a smart-arse..."

Jim swept up the same knife from last night, and swiftly cut through Sebastian's boxer briefs, letting them fall to the floor. He kicked them aside. "I did like them, Sebastian... but you don't wear a stitch in here. Did I neglect to tell you that?" Jim seized his chin in his hands, and kissed Sebastian hard.

He pulled back slightly. "It's good to be the one who makes the rules..." he whispered, and then kissed him for longer.

God... he'd been thinking of this from the moment he woke up.

Completely unacceptable... his soldier had had some kind of bewitching effect on him for the past month... and it was time to put his house back in order again. Starting with his very first overnight guest...

He broke off the kiss, patted Sebastian's cheek and headed to the cabinet of instruments. He pulled out a suede purple flogger, and thwacked it against his own hand.

"Mmm... such a pretty sound! Let's see what pretty sounds we can make with you, Tiger..." he purred, and strode toward him.
The room looked different from last night, and yet, already eerily familiar to Sebastian...

The sheets were changed, and heavy curtains half drawn across the windows. No candles today, not the fire and smoke of a sacrificial site, but a subdued, dim half-light like a cave, where all kinds of creatures might dwell…

A slight shiver of anticipation, thrill, and arousal ran up Sebastian's spine.

*Welcome back, darling.*

Jim's eyes glinted and there was a flash of teeth in his smile as he directed Sebastian to where he wanted him, even assuring him he’d be considerate of his injuries.

Involuntarily Sebastian let out a short huff through his nose – half offended, and half amused at what sounded like an insinuation that he might be afraid of the pain, of getting hurt... It nearly made him laugh. He was by no means belittling Jim's ministrations, but to be honest, as far as the sheer physical discomfort went, he'd experienced things that had been far worse.

So what was it that had him hesitating briefly, before following orders? Before he stepped up to the wooden beam, and let Jim have him in his clutches... He'd done it before… last night when the atmosphere had been so charged, the sheer physical pull so insane, that any alternative but to follow simply didn't exist.

Today - the undercurrent of need and attraction was there too, had been there from the moment they woke up, but not with a raging intensity that blotted out anything else. More like a baseline setting the tone. Never completely disappearing, but leaving room for more mundane interactions – having breakfast, looking at books.

And also, now leaving Sebastian much more acutely aware of what he was doing - that he, when the restraints and the door to the outside world clicked shut and *the rules* shifted into place, gave up all control.

Giving himself into Jim's hands, unconditionally.

To be hurled into another meltdown that fused everything he *craved*, and everything he wouldn't normally even dream of letting anybody do to him, so inextricably together that he couldn't even tell them apart anymore.

So yes, a short moment of hesitation was understandable...
The leather cuffs resettled around his wrists, were cinched tight, snug, but not painful. Or just slightly, just enough to remind him... The bandages around his wrists protected them – a weirdly comforting feeling, even raised and fastened above his head.

Sebastian couldn't help but smile when Jim announced what his transgressions were: being a snarky sod.

“Oh, and here I was under the impression that you liked tha...“ He nearly bit his tongue when the back of a cold blade slid down his abdomen, tearing through the fabric of his briefs. And he elected to stay quiet until they were removed. Allegedly remedying what he should have done himself. Except nobody had mentioned it... Bastard.

“A mere oversight, I'm sure...”

Jim kissed him hard, before he even got around to adding a 'Sir', but he was sure the blame would be laid on him. Oh yes, he could see how much Jim loved making the rules – undoubtedly, some of them as he went along, and the odd one even after Sebastian had broken it.

The kiss that was bestowed on him was delicious, and a bit - furious?

Then it was Sebastian's turn to make an indignant noise when Jim patted his cheek, before turning away. The implement he chose from his collection didn't look too nasty, though. Not as bad as the cane, thank god.

He tried not to smirk.

~

Jim shook his head at Sebastian's comments.

"Just can't stop yourself, can you? Well, I have a cabinet full of fun implements to try on you, so let’s see how much of a dent we can make in that snarky disposition..."

Jim ducked behind him, and ran his fingers over Sebastian's welted back.

"Mmm... gorgeous..." Jim purred, and licked across his back, just under his shoulders but above the M.

Then he stepped back and whipped down the flogger against the damp line.
"Stings, yes?" Jim chuckled as he peered over Sebastian's shoulder to watch his face.

"Well, it's going to sting a hell of a lot more," he said sharply. "You're under the impression that I'm enjoying you mouthing off every five seconds? Well, believe it or not, I'm capable of having seemingly conflicting thoughts in my head. I may be amused by your mouthiness... and still recognize that something needs to be done about it."

Jim circled around Sebastian and slapped his face. "Oh," he breathed. "You've had that coming since the day we met..."

He laughed gleefully. "CEO of a carpet company, wasn't it? Good one...you're so bold, Sebastian..."

His eyes narrowed and he backhanded him hard, watching as a bead of blood appeared on his lip.

"Don't mind if I do..." Jim whispered, kissing him and sucking the blood from his lips.

"So you're holding conflicting thoughts in your head, too?" he asked, pointedly. "You want to do me violence, don't you... and you're fucking enjoying this..." he looked down at Sebastian's rock-hard cock and stroked it lightly.

"All in good time, honey... I'll fuck you once you and I have reached an understanding..." he grinned fiercely. "No matter how long it takes..."

~

The reminders of last night had been with him constantly, every time he moved even slightly (or not at all)... walking, sitting down, raising an arm to grab something from the kitchen shelves - oscillating between a warm glow, soreness, pain, and all the nuances in between.

He hadn't been so consciously aware of the pain back when he’d received it as he was now. Jim's eyes and hands and tongue trailing across his welts pushed Sebastian into a state of full-body hypersensitivity, and he couldn't suppress a hiss and his skin twitching, even though he managed not to flinch at the first contact of the flogger.

No, matters of discipline and blind obedience had never been his strong suit, and if he had ever tried, it hadn't been enough. Probably Jim was right about him being a snarky sod by default.

So maybe he could let this count as mitigating circumstances?
It didn't seem like it though, as his eyes locked onto Sebastian's. There was a spark of amusement there, but more than this, fury - and a hint of dark menace, conveying he would only be pushed so far... and that Sebastian better really try this time.

But hell, what Sebastian could not help Jim with was the dilemma he currently pointed out to him: of simultaneously liking and resenting it.

“Sorry.” It must not have sounded too sincere, because the next second his face was burning. More from indignation than from the slap itself, which he hadn't even seen coming. While a downright dreamy smile appeared on Jim's face, his eyes turning a bit glassy for a moment, relishing what Sebastian had apparently inspired from the day they first met...

Sebastian started to say something, promptly receiving another, more vicious blow, from the back of the same hand and now he was literally snarling into the kiss, tasting blood from where his lip had opened again. The snarl turned into a gasp, when Jim, ever so lightly ran his fingers along his cock (treacherous bastard, that one).

“And what kind of understanding would that be?” he growled.

~

Jim observed Seb's reaction closely. He'd never kissed anyone before who was snarling... damn, that was hot. He'd have to tell him to make sure to do it again sometime - Jim nearly chuckled at the thought.

"Do you think you get to demand answers of me, Sebastian?” Jim asked, with his patented bored voice. "I don't answer to anyone under the sun... I don't intend to start with an employee, no matter how attractive."

He stepped up close to Sebastian, took his chin in hand and squeezed gently.

"And Tiger, it would give away the game to just tell you outright! When you understand it, you'll know...”

Jim grinned at him, and slipped behind him. He wielded the flogger and brought it down on Sebastian's mid-back, careful to avoid the bandage.

Jim ran his hands along the raised and reddening skin.
"I suspect it has something to do with showing respect... let's just see if you can use your mouth to be polite... or if I need to put something in it," Jim said innocently.

He appeared again before Sebastian. "What would your preference be, Tiger?" He peeled out of the dressing gown, and threw it aside. Underneath, he was naked and clearly aroused.

He rubbed himself against Sebastian's pelvis, staring into his eyes intently. "Sorry, didn't quite catch that... Did you have something to say?"

~

When Jim's fingers closed around his chin, something in Sebastian wanted to just rub his face against the hand - and something else felt compelled to testily jerk his head away from the patronising touch.

"... thought you might just give me a list of words I'm not allowed to use," he muttered. So he could check things he was about to say against it... But that would have been too easy, and of course, not the point at all. He knew that. Not mouthing off, or only when it amused Jim, was clearly the training subject today. Duly the flogger bit into his sore skin again, followed by a hand, appreciatively tracing the welts... He breathed out, concentrating again on not flinching away and not fucking leaning into it.

His eyes involuntarily travelled down, when Jim finally got rid of that blasted dressing gown, and Sebastian didn't quite manage to bite back a moan, when he, now gloriously naked and hard, pressed himself against his body. The most tempting option of what he might want in his mouth was currently grinding against his hip - but as Jim might instead opt for a bar of soap out of spite, Sebastian decided he'd rather die than say so.

“No, I don’t,” he mumbled. “Sir.”

~

Jim had watched in amusement as Sebastian's face showed emotion after emotion... he was so delightfully expressive, his Tiger... He felt a surge of pleasure at the thought - his Tiger...

Do not get too attached, Jimmy... could have disastrous consequences, the cold, detached part of him whispered.
Good thing I'm *not* attached, he replied testily. Fecking *drama queen*…

He could have sworn he heard a snort in response.

Ignoring this, he returned to watching Sebastian's expressions change. As he was grinding his cock against hip, he was transfixed by the battle that waged in Sebastian's eyes - really? Just to not say something snarky? Even in the face of being powerless and being threatened with unknown punishment?

More than one drama queen in the room, he thought with amusement.

Finally, Sebastian replied in the negative.

Jim arched an eyebrow. "You're sure?" he said, idly. "All right, then..."

He brought his face close to Sebastian's, and held his face in his hands. "There's still going to be discipline, Sebastian... I did warn you about consequences, my darling. But you spoke *so nicely* just now, I'll make it pleasant for you. That's just the kind of sweet bitch I am..." he whispered. "When I get what I want, I can be *ever* so lovely..."

He moved towards Sebastian's lips slowly. "Are you going to snarl at me again, Tiger?" he murmured, then caught his lower lip and nibbled it gently... before pressing his lips against his and kissing him hungrily.

~

Sebastian couldn't say if Jim's announcement of discipline and consequences made it easier or harder *not* to snarl.

As to whether he'd do it again...?

A small grin pulled at the corner of his mouth.

“Seems inevitable...”

As inevitably as Jim the sweet bitch would change back into Jim the insufferable bastard.
“Just not now…” Sebastian whispered back, then going very still as Jim dug his teeth into his lip gently, unerringly finding the still-bleeding spot.

Arousal turned the small, sharp sliver of pain into something delicious and Sebastian devoured it, kissing back fiercely.

~

Jim found himself enjoying the kiss quite a bit more than the situation called for.

Alright, enough, he barked at himself. Don’t get carried away with frivolities...

His fingers dug into Sebastian’s hair, and he pulled him deeper into the kiss for just a moment before breaking free. Jim rubbed his lower lip self-consciously for just an instant before yanking Sebastian’s head back.

“Mmm… so glad I have your deference, my darling. But as I said… I need to have word with you about your wilfulness. And I find it most effective to have my tools deliver my words for me…”

Jim smirked and brought the flogger down hard against Sebastian’s muscular thigh.

Oooh… that definitely stung, he thought with pleasure.

~

Well, for someone preferring tools to deliver his words, Jim seemed to like the sound of his own voice quite a lot. Thing was… Sebastian liked it too. Smooth, expressive, changeable… and hypnotic. Sometimes he was sure he could feel it as much as Jim's hands, or whatever tool they wielded.

Unfortunately, vexingly, Sebastian Moran didn't have a deferential bone in his body.

But he had also never met anybody like the man in front of him.

So there was no snarling for the time being, just a gleam of slightly, subconsciously bared teeth, and his neck muscles straining and resisting before they gradually relaxed, giving in to the pull wrenching his head back. (Fuck if his hair didn't have to be just the right length for Jim to get a good grip…)
Sebastian’s gaze – down his nose by necessity - stayed locked onto Jim’s, through half closed eyelids. He was breathing shallowly, hyperaware of how much his body infuriatingly had a mind of its own - not just absorbing, but welcoming the burning sensation imparted by another sharp lick of the flogger.

~

“Enjoying it, aren’t you…” Jim cooed, and brought the flogger down on his other thigh. “I had such a strong feeling about you… but of course, you never know about someone until you have them in your hands…”

He ran his hands up Sebastian’s thighs, and then stroked his cock devastatingly slowly.

“Mmm… I like having you in my hands,” Jim breathed. He stopped stroking and instead rained down lashes of the flogger along his thighs to the beautiful sound of Sebastian gasping and moaning.

“You’re doing very well now that you’ve shut up for a goddamn minute,” Jim said sweetly. “Maybe you can have a small treat…”

He sank to his knees, and dug his fingers into Sebastian’s reddened thighs. Then he took his hard, beautiful cock into his mouth.

Can’t do this too often, Jim thought, as he licked and sucked with pleasure, until Sebastian was groaning loudly. Or for too long…

After a few moments, he pulled his lips off Sebastian’s cock and gazed up at him. His soldier’s lips were parted and his eyes were unfocused and dreamy.

“Oh! Just realized, we can’t have the other side feeling neglected…” he said in an apologetic voice, and walked around Sebastian.

Fuck… you are so hot, he thought as he lashed Sebastian’s hamstrings, and then moved up to his lower back, enjoying the soundscape of groans and crying out. When Jim was finished, he stepped back to admire his handiwork.

“God… you really do look like a Tiger…” he breathed. “You’re done… and you’re a fucking work of art.”
He quickly undid Sebastian’s restraints, and watched him as he stretched gingerly.

“Come here,” he said urgently, and pulled Sebastian towards the bed. Jim pushed him down, smiling when Sebastian winced as his back hit the sheets. Jim crawled over him and started sucking his cock again. When he felt Sebastian’s hands on his hair, he smacked them away.

“Hands off, Sebastian,” he said, eyes glinting. “Unless I say you can touch…”

He wrapped his lips around Sebastian’s cock and began to suck hard.

He stopped and looked up. “ Fucking touch me,” he growled, and sucked harder.

~

Sebastian tilted his head back, a sound coming from his throat that left his face burning with something bordering on... shame? Jim's whispered words seemed to lay him open, dredging something up that had never been meant for anybody to see, and leaving Sebastian shivering at the exposure. It was something he hadn't even – really - seen himself. He felt raw and twitchy, just like all the nerve endings in his ravaged skin - about the undeniable fact that, yes, he enjoyed it... Craved it...

The lash as much as Jim's mouth on his cock, the knife to his back as much as Jim's cock inside him...

Metal clanked and the thick leather around his wrists creaked faintly. The jumbled, half-fried mess of his brain didn't even realize his limbs had tried to move... just as it wasn't privy to what he might have done, had he been free -

Maybe kill the man who was vivisecting him with just a few whispered words...

Maybe sink to his knees before him...

The last vestiges of coherent thought fled the scene when Jim dropped out of sight, taking him into his mouth. Wrenching a blissful groan from Sebastian, before a bout of blows from the whip restored equilibrium, just a few seconds later.

Then... it was done.

When Jim released the rings from the hooks above his head - the cuffs around his wrists snugly remaining – he stood dazed for a moment, before he cautiously tried to get used to being in charge of
his own movements again (not too much, because surely this was temporary). And yes, he really did feel like a fucking canvas, covered with vividly glowing strokes by a mad painter... who was currently staring at him in rapture, with his huge, beautiful black eyes, and then impatiently pulling him to the bed. Pushing him down.

Sebastian abandoned the attempt to take some weight off his back with his elbows, in favour of making the most of the short time he might have the use of his hands. With a moan, a curse and a prayer, all condensing into one breathless, heartfelt “Fuck...” when Jim dove down to his cock again.

The ensuing capricious changing between denial and permission to touch was enough to drive him to distraction, so when he was finally not only allowed but ordered to do so, he didn’t hold back. Gasping at an especially delicious swipe of Jim's tongue, his fingers dug harshly into the back of his neck. Then they raked up and entangled themselves into his hair.

~

Jim grinned around Sebastian’s cock - god, he loved behaving like a prick. He was so good at it... Sebastian’s mind must be so disoriented by now. It had to be this way, of course... you had to break someone down before you built them back up - better and stronger than before. But as yours... and if Sebastian was anything... he was his... wasn’t he?

Jim’s brow furrowed as he continued to suck - he was dimly aware of moaning, as he questioned himself. Was that really the end game here? For Sebastian to be his? What happened to ‘today, and then here and there as he saw fit’?

Well, he thought in irritation. If he was going to spend time with him today, and repeat this again sometime in the future... it was important that his Tiger was kept fully in check - as much as an unruly Tiger could be kept in check. Jim reminded himself that even a trained predatory cat was a walking death machine that could turn against its owner.

Unwelcome thoughts started leaking into his head, like ‘well, if he’s not mine, then... is he free to do as he likes?’ Instead of answering this, Jim stopped sucking abruptly.

“Sit up,” he said roughly, and crawled off him to the headboard.

Sebastian did, and Jim pushed him to turn around.

“Give me your wrists....”
Jim expertly attached the leather cuffs to hooks on the headboard.

He turned to look at Sebastian’s profile and instead froze for an instant when he saw blue eyes staring at him like bottomless oceans...

His eyes locked on Sebastian’s, and breathing softly, Jim found himself stroking his hair. Then he ran his tongue over his lips, before disappearing behind Sebastian’s back. He reached out to grab the lube from the nightstand, and prepared himself first, and then Sebastian’s entrance. Jim bit the back of his neck as he did, and made a growling sound in his throat.

~

The slight scrape of teeth on his cock jerked Sebastian from inundating pleasure back to some semblance of attention. There was no way he could really concentrate, but still his sex-addled brain tried desperately to determine what he might have done wrong. Dimly remembering Jim's reaction from this morning, the moment they'd been waking up, he knew too much initiative wasn't met with approval. So he eased the grip of his hands on Jim's head and took care to not push up into that bewitchingly skillful mouth too eagerly… exhaling with a moan when it returned to what it was doing.

And although he was getting dangerously close to losing it – was, in fact about to utter a warning to that effect – he couldn't suppress a tiny sound of protest when Jim suddenly stopped.

But by now he was in a state where he followed the rules - and roughly uttered orders -without the slightest hesitation. Followed the hands that pushed him around, and to his knees...

Jim had accomplished in a day what the Army had struggled with for years: searing some direct path from his ears to his limbs, effortlessly bypassing any opinions the brain might offer on the matter.

Jim had also firmly established a direct path from his shackled wrists down to his throbbing cock... holy fuck. Sebastian's head dropped slightly while he bit back a groan, then he turned to look at Jim, barely able to focus. Whatever Jim saw – for a second he went just as still. Then he raised his hand, lightly running his fingers through Sebastian's hair – a brief touch nearly shockingly intimate, but somehow it was also enough to pull them back and out of that moment, which seemed to hold something they were both not ready to deal with yet. And maybe never would be.

At the sound of the lube bottle opening, and the soft squelching noise of its contents being applied - Jesus fucking Christ … he was as embarrassingly ready as Pavlov's fucking dog.

The sound that escaped him when he felt Jim's teeth in his neck, and slippery, cool fingers preparing him, was something between a yelp and a snarl.
Jim felt pleasure move through him like a wave as he prodded Sebastian internally with his fingers found him relaxing under his dextrous ministrations, opening to him, and giving a startled snarl when he felt Jim's teeth on his neck.

"Mmm... what delicious sounds you make, Tiger..." Jim breathed against his ear. "I'd like to see what other sweet sounds can come out of you. What to do..."

He pressed his cock against Sebastian's opening, and licked the back of his neck. Then he grasped the left cheek of his arse, to hold him in place while he slowly advanced into him. He exhaled slowly as he paused. His eyes closed as he felt Sebastian's muscles adjusting and squeezing around his cock, and then opening more to him. Jim pushed in further, groaning.

He winced. Fuck... this was almost too good... and he wasn't supposed to be the one making sounds like a lusty, lovelorn Romeo. Juliet. Whatever.

His fingernails dug into Sebastian's cheek, and he trapped his ear lobe between his teeth. He pulled away with a growl, as he pushed in as far as he could go.

And try as he might, Jim couldn't keep himself from moaning as he felt pleasure mounting, and he began to move inside his Tiger.

A small part of him wanted instinctively to inch away… it would not be a walk in the park, not when you weren't used to it and were still sore from the night before. The other part of him just braced himself against the headboard because he was gagging for it. With the initial breach came one deep, ragged breath, which then turned into a filthy groan as Jim slowly pushed deeper. Not in silence, either...

His body, a quick learner where muscle memory was involved, adjusted more quickly than last night. Riding the initial wave of discomfort, an even bigger one swept up and through him in an intoxicating rush, from every point that Jim's body took possession of his – nails digging into his skin, his cock hot and hard inside him, teeth grazing his neck, his ear...

“Quite beautiful sounds, as well,” Sebastian breathed. (Clearly, he was not a quick learner, where his mouth was concerned...)
Retaliation followed immediately, with a growl and the final shove inside. A sharp-edged flash of pain had Sebastian's knuckles whitening, holding on through another wave that transformed into blinding lust and left them both panting. For a few seconds, they were motionless, quivering with tension. When Jim started to move again, Sebastian's mind went blank. Then he pushed back against him, feeling his breath hot on the back of his neck - his own caught in his throat for a moment, then broke free as a gasp.

~

When Sebastian pushed back, Jim's mouth dropped open.

It was almost too good... how was he going to maintain any sense of control, any sense of -

Oh - god -

The fucker did it again, and Jim had gasped in response.

All right... enough. It was time to take control again.

He moved sinuously against Sebastian's body - one hand stretched to Sebastian's restrained wrists, and curled around them - as if to doubly possess him. The other hand grasped Sebastian's left hip. And then he yanked Sebastian's pelvis back, driving himself more deeply into his arse.

They both groaned at this. Well - that's fucking great, he seethed. Sex had never been like this before... what the fuck was going on??

His body was moving of its own accord - another first. He observed as slowly his and Sebastian's body synced up and moved together lustily. His hand moved down from his wrists, down his arms, and over his shoulder to his chest. Now he had Sebastian's back pressed against his chest, and his arm possessively over Sebastian's chest. While holding onto his pelvis, and pushing him back onto his cock.

Careful, Jim... he was so tight yesterday...

and there was something almost fragile about his soldier... deep down.

Jim shook himself. He was not here to hold an assassin's hand and kiss away his sadness...

He was here to fuck him senseless and - and -
Jim leaned over his shoulder and kissed Sebastian fiercely, his tongue slipping past his lips.

~

Sebastian's eyes closed and a raw, helpless sound escaped him when he felt Jim move in a way that threatened to turn him into a wanting mess. His muscles twitched around Jim's cock, which now brushed more firmly against the spot where ... God fuck yesss - He nearly bucked against it.

He could feel every inch of Jim... not just his cock, but his thighs pressing against his own, his hips against his arse, his chest against his back, sliding over skin, damp with sweat and burning with the multitude of cuts and scrapes from last night... Avoiding the knife wound beneath the dressing of gauze and tape, but not quite completely...

Yes, there was something to be said for that position, and it nearly compensated for not being able to see Jim...

What he could see when his eyes opened was a stark image of such power, it seared itself not just into his visual memory but the very fabric of his being: his wrists, bandaged and tied down, and a strong, pale, beautiful hand possessively closing over them... then moving along his arm and around his chest and pulling him up, back, closer, into the next thrust.

The groan in his ears wasn't entirely his own, but Jim's as well... it was a sound of pleasure, thrill, fury, of control slipping, and it was so absolutely delicious, Sebastian wanted to roll in it.

Because he knew it was him who'd wrenched it from Jim. Because - even completely in his hands and at the mercy of the man - he had the power to do so... He turned his head and responded to a kiss just as fiercely as Jim had started it, breathing into it with a near-triumphant, low-pitched growl...

~

God, this was fucking intense, and there was no way it was going to last very long by the moans that were being unleashed by both of them. Jim had been trying to keep from getting too carried away, but it was getting harder and harder (hah) to hold back.

Dimly he became aware of the sounds filling the room - the slamming of their bodies, the bed springs squeaking, the headboard thumping against the wall, and a lusty cacophony of very manly grunts and groans...
Suddenly he was reminded of the soundtrack of Sebastian’s one and only hookup at his apartment, performed for Jim’s surveillance equipment. A snarling laugh escaped his lips, and Sebastian looked back curiously.

“What?” he panted. “What’s so - funny?”

“Your performance,” Jim lashed out, thrusting hard into him, making him gasp. “From a few days ago... that was fun for you, was it?”

Sebastian paused for a moment, then chuckled. “Oh - that...”

“That...” Jim growled. “You like games? Me too, Tiger!” He licked the side of Sebastian’s neck, and whispered into his ear, “We could play some games sometime...” He smiled as Sebastian shivered.

“Mmm... I’ll take that as a yesss....” He licked his ear, and began to thrust faster.

~

When it came to fucking, Jim was a force of nature and Sebastian felt like he was... unravelling. He was holding on to the headboard, torn between the impulse to lower himself down - seeking some sort of contact for his raging hard, already damp cock - and the urge to push back onto the one inside him... Coherent thoughts became fleeting and vague, like the one that he was going to pay dearly tomorrow - a working day and he’d probably barely be able to bloody walk... hopefully, the assignment coming his way would be a nice, static sniper's job, comprised of a few hours huddled up in a snug hideaway...

Hold on... was that a laugh, forced in between the harsh breaths and exquisite, mindless noises behind him? Vision a bit hazy, he checked, and yes, it was... Asking for the well of Jim's amusement, he was even graced with an answer - which took a few moments to sink in. When it dawned on him what Jim referred to, Sebastian grinned. Of course that had been funny! And quite satisfying, too...

“You ... didn't think so?” he panted. “Shame...”

Gasping under an especially vicious thrust, he bit back any advice to turn off your TV if you didn't like the programme. Mouthiness hadn’t gone down well the last time... but seriously? When you found cameras installed in your fucking bedroom, it wasn't exactly far-fetched to assume there was a tiny voyeuristic streak, rather than a jealous one – not when your voyeur was your boss in a strictly
professional relationship.

He muttered something, barely intelligible, about how he didn't even file a complaint with his union representative, who … “surely would not have approv-

fffuck...” Jim's hips had snapped forward and Sebastian couldn't help but moan when he felt his tongue sliding up the side of his neck, and heard his voice whisper deliciously ominous things into his ear about games to be played...

His knees nearly gave out, which was a good excuse to let them slip backwards a bit, like subconsciously giving in against the renewed force and weight of Jim's thrusts.

The rumpled pillow beneath him didn't promise much friction... Still, probably more efficient than to apply for a courtesy reach-around by the boss...

~

Jim listened to Sebastian's snarky comments, and laughed slowly as he fucked him, rhythmically and intensely.

"So you lasted, what, twenty minutes without mouthing off? What the fuck are you doing getting involved with me?" he murmured in Sebastian's ear, not breaking his pace. "You joined SAS, went to war, became a contract killer, and then fucked Jim Moriarty? How much of a death wish do you have, Sebastian?" Jim laughed again low in his throat, relishing the shiver he saw go through his soldier as he thrust into him.

"Well, guess what? You don't have my permission to die," he hissed. "No unnecessary risks from now on. Hear that?"

His hand snaked around Sebastian's hip and grasped his prize. "I'm not sure you deserve this, Tiger..." he growled. "But I'm feeling benevolent. Just be aware of one very important rule... I come first. I know you loooove to break rules, but - you don't break that one."

His hand tightened on Sebastian's cock, and slowly, purposefully, he began to stroke. "Clear?" he breathed.

Jim closed his eyes as he heard gasping and moaning filling in the room. Dimly he became aware that he was contributing to the commotion. He pressed his face against the back of Sebastian's head and neck, and felt his body surge towards the culmination of their desire.
Well, twenty snark-free minutes were pretty good in his books. Probably not in Jim's, though…

“I don't, particularly,” Sebastian muttered, “and technically I didn’t…” (have a death wish, and fuck Jim Moriarty, respectively).

His mind was starting to get all scrambled. The forceful yet measured thrusts, that seemed to drive home everything the low, dangerous voice hissed into his ear nearly left him delirious. Making it harder and harder to concentrate on what exactly the voice was saying.

And God, how could the man still talk while delivering an excruciatingly slow, intense fuck that pushed Sebastian, equally slowly but inexorably towards the brink of meltdown.

His breaths were ragged, torn from him in time with Jim's movements, turning into a low moan with a decidedly grateful note, when Jim's hand closed around his cock. Which was a double-edged treat when combined with the commandment to hold off until allowed otherwise. Always.

“How in hell he was going to accomplish that became the most existential question ever, when Jim pressed into him again, and Sebastian felt his breath, his mouth, his face against the back of his head
and neck. His wrists pulled against the cuffs as he arched up, his whole body pushing back against Jim... Throwing himself into the fuck, into the surge of need and wantwantwant -

epic mistake! - fuckfuckfuck

He tried to get off the sweeping wave thinking of something -

anything, like -

counting sheep, writing a shopping list, reciting *The Rules*...

… Never mind the not-dying part, just never, ever come first!

Even smoking in bed was allowed,

but only if you'd come first,

but only after Jim...

~

Jim's hand ran languorously over Sebastian's muscular chest, squeezing his left nipple in a possessive manner, before moving up to his throat. He squeezed gently, as he continued to drive into him.

"No. Not technically..." he agreed, his voice rough. "But you'd *like* to, wouldn't you... You've already imagined what it would be like to *take* me... to shove your big cock into my arse... to give it to me good and hard, and make me moan..." he said breathlessly and stroked his cock.

Jim squeezed his throat again. "Would you like to fuck me, Sebastian?" his voice smoky and seductive.

"God - *Yes* - Sir," Sebastian groaned.

Jim moved his hand up to Sebastian's head and turned it around to look at him. He gave him a feral smile and thrust into him forcefully. "Then do as you're *fucking* told, honey..." he whispered fiercely, and pulled him against his lips.

Jim moved his hand around his jaw to hold his face firmly in place. They kissed feverishly and Jim moaned into Sebastian's mouth. *Fuck*... he was so close - *so close* -

He broke away from the kiss. Once again pressing his face against Sebastian's hair and neck, he
closed his eyes. "Oh - fuck - oh - god -" he ranted, and buried himself in Sebastian over and over and over again...

"Fucking Christ," he whimpered, and stroked Sebastian harder and faster. Desire and heat mounted in him to an almost dizzying level, and he gasped and moaned as he rocked against Sebastian's arse.

Shivers moved through his body, and the shivers became shudders... there was a sense of being suspended on a trembling bridge, and then a snap before tumbling over the edge. There was an explosion of pleasure-ecstasy-euphoria, and he was dimly aware of semen leaving his body in violent pulses. He collapsed forward against Sebastian's body, and rested his head against his shoulder. He had stopped stroking Sebastian's cock in the midst of his convulsions against his body, but now he resumed his rhythmic motions.

"Come, Tiger..." he panted against his ear. "Come for me, now..."

~

Under the force of Jim's thrusts somehow Sebastian's arms slowly folded, until he was braced against the headboard not only with his hands, but one elbow as well. Leaning into the touch of Jim's hands, even as one found his neck, he had to force his answer through pressure playfully tightening around his throat.

Surely 'Don't fantasize about fucking the boss' would be added to the list next?

It wasn't.

Much, much worse - it was dangled before his mind's eye in the most vivid colours, and Sebastian groaned loudly, with a pitch of desperation to it... trying to drown out that low husky voice painting that picture, slightly out of breath... Not that the image wasn't in his wank bank already – but listening to it being described in detail, even with an insinuation this might be a possibility… Sebastian didn't know how he managed to not come on the spot.

He felt his head being wrenched around, and, looking into those black eyes, as half-crazed with lust as he imagined his own to be, there was a lurch of vertigo again. What followed was more a bite than a kiss, vicious and desperate on both sides. There didn't seem to be an inch of their skin left that wasn't touching...

Jim broke away, and his movements - pushing, surging into him were those of a man possessed and then - that whimper ... God, to Sebastian's ears it was the most beautiful sound ever. Sweating,
trembling, he hoarsely whispered a string of soft, incoherent profanities, urging Jim on, urging him to come...

Felt him shivering - tensing - bucking - spilling into him... Tasted blood, as he had sunk his teeth into his own knuckles to hold off ... But knowing it was too late, groaning as heat and pressure coiled up inside him like a spring... It was like teetering on a tightrope during that one second, knowing you'd already lost your balance, and were just one, briefly suspended moment away from... crashing. Jim was still inside him, his heaving chest warm against his back, head on his shoulder, hand on his cock – everything on its own would have been enough, but eventually it felt like it was just his voice, like a feather brushing against a hair trigger, and Sebastian came... all over the sheets, the pillow, and the hand that stroked him through a release of white-hot intensity that didn't seem to end...

Until they sagged into one sweaty, messy heap, completely spent...

~

Jim was still experiencing aftershocks from his own orgasm when Sebastian went hurtling into his - at Jim's words, no less. And it seemed like a really fucking good one...

He was still panting and leaning against his strong body as Sebastian ejaculated onto the sheets. (The pillow too, darling? he thought with exasperation.)

Jim discovered that he liked the feeling of Sebastian's body against his... like, really liked. This was not exactly welcome information... What the fuck was he supposed to do with it? Tell his employee how much he enjoyed their cuddling?

So instead, he pulled out and held himself up just long enough to unfasten Sebastian's restraints. As Sebastian rubbed his wrists and stretched himself out, Jim fell down against his pillows. He took the pillow that Sebastian had messed up, and stripped off the pillowcase. He held it out to him.

"You can throw that in the laundry bin," Jim said innocently. Sebastian just blinked sleepily at him. Jim was awfully tempted to scratch him behind the ears, and see if he purred.

"When you go the bathroom," he grumbled, rolling his eyes. He crumpled it in a ball and threw it at Sebastian, who caught it one-handed. He looked at it, then used it to wipe the stickiness from his cock. "Thanks," he grinned, and tossed it to the floor.

Jim stared at this in shock, and laugh escaped his lips before he's realised it. The audacity... he barely stopped himself from bursting into hysterical laughter.

"Defiant. Unruly. Fucking. Tiger," he muttered. "You realise I see everything and I forget nothing?"
he said archly. He got comfy on his side and looked at Sebastian.

"But maybe if I were distracted by a good story, I would overlook it... why were you discharged from the army?" He made sure to keep his voice curious rather than his usual sarcastic or bored tone. He was well aware that this would not be a story Sebastian would share with most people.

Jim was not most people.

But Sebastian clearly had a stubborn streak, indomitable will, and a hell of an attitude - all of which rivaled Jim's. Downright mind-boggling... and intoxicating, if he cared to look closely at it. Which he certainly did not.

So if Jim was told to piss off, he knew he would still get the story out of him eventually... one way or another.

He patted the spot next to him and watched Sebastian as he settled onto his back. Gingerly.

~

With the surge of endorphins receding, Sebastian became aware of the pain again... well, everywhere… but for the moment it was just a low, nearly pleasant ache, and he felt relaxed, a bit drowsy. The last tremors slowly subsiding, the blissful heap of Jim's weight, his breath against his neck, all this nearly as good as...

- oh shut it, Moran. Don't get used to it.

When the cuffs fell away from his wrists, he just dropped, first on his elbows, then to his stomach. The desecrated pillow had been snatched away and a grin ghosted over his face while he stretched out, and then rolled onto his side, drowsily watching Jim stripping off the pillowcase. Which was then held in his direction. He never even lifted a finger.

Seriously? They were going to have that 'laundry basket, now' discussion, again?

Ah, no, they didn't. When the offensive item was merely balled up and thrown at him, Sebastian chuckled as he raised a hand, still quick enough to catch it. And as it was already defiled, he didn't see what difference it would make if he used it for a perfunctory clean-up.
Judging by the look of utter shock and horror on Jim's face... that was not what he was supposed to do with it? For some reason the soft string of exasperated, abusive endearments, as well as Jim's reminder that he never forgot anything, meandered down Sebastian’s spine as sweetly as a trickle of honey. His smile broadened into a toothy grin and the relaxed, affirmative noise he made didn't sound overly concerned.

Leaning to the side he had dropped the pillowcase and was reaching for a pack of cigarettes on the nightstand, when Jim asked for a story. Just for a blink, Sebastian froze mid-movement…

It was not just any story he wanted, but a very specific one...

Sebastian rolled back up, put a cigarette between his lips and lit it (as the Rules said he could), slowly settling against the stripped pillow. After taking a deep drag, exhaling towards the ceiling, he then turned his head, regarding Jim with a look that seemed to ponder the question, or rather whether he should answer it at all. For a moment it didn't seem as though he would.

Then, without being prompted and even without thinking about it, he just tilted his forearm in Jim's direction, wordlessly questioning if he fancied a pull from the fag.

“All told? - because of a fucking phone....”

For a while it seemed like this would be all he had to say on the matter, but then, after he'd gotten his cigarette back, he added: “Well, the breaking of the Geneva Conventions and 'misconduct towards a superior officer' might have had something to do with it, as well…”

He resumed smoking, briefly closing his eyes. The corners of his mouth curled slightly in ironic amusement. Considering several of the offences he'd committed within twenty minutes carried a sentence of ten-years or life imprisonment, Jim could count himself lucky he didn't have to break him out of Pentonville Prison for the job interview.

~

Jim, upon being offered a drag off Sebastian's cigarette, somehow managed to keep from smiling smugly at the gesture. He certainly had planned to snatch it from him repeatedly, but it was far more genteel to just sit back and be offered it. Who said Tigers can't be trained? he thought wryly and suppressed a mighty eye-roll.

But he was easily distracted when Sebastian began to answer him. It came out slowly at first, as
though from a rusty pipe. It took every bit of discipline he had to not shout back, "What about the phone? Breaking the Geneva Conventions?? What the fuck, Moran? Tell me!!"

But he merely listened with a serene little smile, and plucked the cigarette from Sebastian's fingers while his eyes were closed. Fuck gentility. Jim was no gentleman, he was a force of fucking nature - and forces of fucking nature did as they saw fit.

~

Sebastian only continued after he'd gotten his cigarette back. The reason he didn't much care to talk or think about the events in question, wasn't some headshrinky crap about traumatizing experiences - this wasn't one of them - and neither did he regret what he'd done.

But it had been the kind of watershed moment that divided everything into Before and After.

A pivotal point, derailing not just his career, but… his entire life.

With an imperceptible shrug he explained, “I questioned a captive enemy, got a bit carried away…”

He seemed to hear what he'd just said, and then corrected himself. “No... I suppose I didn't.”

Lack of impulse control didn't have anything to do with it. In fact, he had been in a state of icy calm, when he'd kicked the feet from under the man and got down to what was usually sugarcoated as enhanced interrogation. Just that they hadn't been in some CIA black site or on a mission in the back of beyond, but smack in the middle of Camp Bastion.

“It had all started out with some major fuck-up we didn't even have anything to do with. We just... happened to be there…” A British patrol had ventured to meet with the leader of a Taliban splinter group that had proposed some deal or cooperation - and how after a fucking decade of war down there anyone would still fall for anything one of those fanatical ragheads said was truly beyond him - but some fuckwit in headquarters had. Hellbent on seeing his name go down in history as the bringer of peace, he guessed - to a fucking place that would likely only ever know peace after they'd all killed each other off. (Put up a fence around it and let them have at it, would have been Sebastian's proposition, if anyone had asked.)

“Anyway – the only thing that did go down was that hapless patrol. Five killed, and worse, three taken hostage. One of which appeared in the leading role of a nice little video on Al Jazeera, two hours later.” Sebastian's hand made a terse but quite distinct gesture across his throat, before bringing the cigarette to his lips again. Another patrol, choppers, drone flyovers… brought up zilch regarding clues where the hostages might be.
“But, as it happened, they didn't just have three of ours, well... two by then, but we also had two of theirs... Two blokes, picked up on a roadblock just the day before with a cartload, literally, of guns. So - I went to talk to them...”

Down there the line between civilians and non-civilians was blurry at best, but Sebastian didn't give a flying fuck. He didn't see a single reason why someone who didn't adhere to any rules should be given the courtesy in return...

~

Jim was listening so intently he forgot to steal the cigarette. He'd been so focused on what he'd do if Sebastian shut him down, that he wasn't prepared for him launching into the story... and god, what a story... Desecrated pillowcase already forgotten, Jim had to stop himself from putting his chin under his hand and listening with a rapt expression on his face.

Fuck's sake, he thought, irritated at himself. You knew he was a soldier...

(But such a bad-ass soldier, his inner voice sighed dreamily.)

Stop that now... he told himself firmly.

His resolve lasted for one full minute - until the point in the story when Sebastian said grimly, "So - I went to talk to them..."

Fuuuuck, Jim thought, and exhaled slowly. Wordlessly, he reached for the cigarette, and took a long drag before handing it back. When their fingers touched, he barely suppressed a shiver.

~

“Starting to feel a bit like Scheherezade here,” Sebastian muttered with a slight grin, taking the cigarette that was handed back to him... Jim actually did look as if he was listening to a spellbinding fairytale, which Sebastian actually found quite... cute.

(Seriously?! cute?! a criminal psychopath who probably considered skinning him over a desecrated pillowcase?!)
Right - where were they -

Naturally there hadn't been any point in discussing illegal procedures with headquarters, so Sebastian had just taken six of his men – volunteers unfazed by the possibility of their tour ending with a court martial – to the detention facility, stood down the guards and dragged out one of the two prisoners.

He paused, exhaling the last bit of smoke from the cigarette, which was down to a stub by now, before putting it out.

“You see, it's hard to get to them... their whole loony concept of martyrdom makes these fuckers quite impervious to death threats.” Nevertheless, not totally immune if the process of dying promised to be highly unpleasant. Within five minutes after Sebastian had set to work on him, the man had been reduced to a screaming, writhing mess - and, as it turned out another five minutes later, he did know enough about the local insurgency to cough up some useful information...

All this had caused quite a stir and the gathering of a growing audience, but nobody seemed inclined to intervene. When someone finally did, Sebastian committed the outrageous offence of threatening a superior officer by drawing a gun on him, but… quite honestly, it couldn't make matters much worse than they already were. (Or so he'd thought…)

He shrugged, then lit another cigarette and threw the lighter back onto the night stand.

“We got the hostages out, though…” And coming back to the Camp two days later, he'd been the one marched into the detention facility.

“At the court martial a few weeks later, the prosecution didn't seem to have a lot of witnesses who remembered anything quite clearly enough to give reliable statements. But turns out they did have video evidence... Because some fucking dolt had gotten his phone out and filmed it, and sent snippets around to his mates too... "

So no, no amount of covering up, calling in favours, and leaning on witnesses had saved him this time.

~

As Jim listened to the story, he felt like he became a fascinated observer, unnoticed by the people in the scene. He watched as Sebastian interrogated the prisoner for a mere ten minutes before he derived the information he needed... all to rescue hostages? His soldier had a heart, it seems... but it
didn't stand in the way of being brutally effective, as the situation called for. Jim may not have had an empathetic bone in his body, but if there was one thing he respected it was efficacy - getting the job done no matter what.

And clearly Sebastian agreed.

Jim felt a thrill as he watched Sebastian draw a gun on his superior with cold fury.

Mmmm.... in the scene, Jim circled Sebastian, tilting his head to fully take in his expression.

Fuck, the man was lethal and beautiful... He had done well by naming him Tiger...

Jim flicked the superior officer out of the scene with a finger, and found himself at Sebastian's court martial. He watched his soldier in dress uniform sitting at a table, his face a cold mask as the prosecution droned on... with a rumbling dark cloud occasionally passing over his countenance. Jim watched the verdict being delivered, and from within the scene he looked up and spoke to Sebastian sitting behind the table.

"And how, dear Tiger, did you manage to get off with only a dishonourable discharge?" he asked curiously. "Surely some of the charges should have resulted in you sitting behind bars?"

He placed his hands on the table and leaned towards him. "Scheherezade... are you drawing parallels between me and a suspicious but mighty King, known for murdering his consorts?"

His next thought was most unwelcome: And between you and the clever creature who captures the King's heart?

Pah, Jim thought with disdain. Sorry, Scheherezade... There's no heart here left to capture...

~

Sebastian grinned when Jim asked if he'd just compared him to a murderous king, prone to do away with his playthings as soon as they ceased to sufficiently entertain him.

“Hm - should I?” he asked innocently. And, he thought, more importantly: how am I doing?

Not too badly it seemed, as the dark eyes of his discerning listener were practically sparkling with glee and fascination.
And yes, all things considered, it was a very valid question how Sebastian had gotten away with just a dishonourable discharge.

“Well, top brass was in a bit of a fix ...“ The operation had been a success which had not just saved two soldiers, but the army a whole lot of grief and further youtube broadcasts of beheadings (not to mention some arses responsible for the initial botch-up) – but the preluding... intelligence gathering by Col. Sebastian Moran was impossible to cover up, even though that was something the military usually excelled at. Sebastian knew there were quite a few who secretly didn't even disapprove of what he'd done – if he'd only fucking done it in private. And of course, Brigadier Thomas Lawliet from the 26th terribly disapproved of having a gun shoved in his face and being told to bugger off.

“They cut me a deal. So much spare time on my hands – somehow a lot of people weren't keen on that...”

Sebastian flicked ash off his cigarette into the little china bowl while he continued – how he had been perfectly prepared to dredge all sorts of skeletons (and also more unsavory remains) out of each and everyone's cupboard.

“So – they would let me go, and I would go quietly. And not, for instance, write a book.” An affliction that seemed increasingly rampant amongst retired members of the armed forces. Never mind Chris Ryan and all the other fuckers who could barely hold a pen, but 'Himalayan Blunders at the Hindu Kush' by Col. S. Moran was a book quite a number of people did not want to see on the shelves. “Pity.”

He slightly shrugged one shoulder. “But yes, all things considered, I was lucky.” He grinned and stretched lazily. “Current position doesn't leave much to be desired.”

~

Jim couldn't help but grin back, although his gaze was a good deal sharper.

"Oh, I'm so glad you approve...” He slipped the cigarette out of Sebastian's hand and held it to his own lips. He ignored the charge he felt when their fingers touched.

"Well, we've certainly had former soldiers in our employ, but never one with such a lofty background and decorated military career. Although I must say, I'm even more impressed with the final days of your military career than all the other days combined. Taking the law into your own hands... committing brutal acts of violence... threatening a general with a gun... and then, the cherry on top, blackmailing the military into letting you go scot-free. You ruthless. Insubordinate. Tiger.
Your discharge wasn't dishonourable... it was a thing of fucking beauty. If they didn't see your worth... you were wasted on the armed forces, Sebastian..." Jim said, his smile growing fiercer.

"Well, I see your worth, darling. And it's not for you to follow a lot of ridiculous, draconian rules..." Jim considered this for a moment, then chuckled. "Well, maybe some..." he conceded. “But with more delicious payoff...” Eyes gleaming, he exhaled smoke.

"Professionally speaking, every single thing I do, and that my employees do for me, has an end game in sight... an unassailable Empire, lurking in the shadows... thumbing its nose at government, military, financial institutions, multinational conglomerates, all the behemoths that think they rule the world. Well, I'm here to say... Wrong. So very, very wrong. No one on this godless green earth tells me what to do... I remake the world as I see fit." Jim took another drag of the cigarette, and smoke rose around him.

"And you, my darling... you are a part of that, now. You see yourself as a sniper, an assassin, as security... but I meant what I said to you in the car - you can find your rightful place in this organization. You have a mind for the big picture, for strategy and for getting things done, no matter what the cost. When you're ready to step into that role, honey... that will be a very interesting conversation. But until then... we'll find ways to amuse ourselves, won't we? Professionally speaking, of course..."

He handed back the cigarette, and let his fingers linger against Sebastian's for just a moment longer than necessary.

"And as for this murderous, mighty king..." he said in a silky voice. "He's decreed you're safe for another day. Well, Scheherezade... I'm taking a shower."

Jim gave him a significant look as he got up. He headed to the bathroom, and left the door open.
You Know Where I Want You

Talking about his dishonourable discharge was like prodding a wound you'd convinced yourself
didn't bother you anymore, because it had scabbed over and healed, more or less… leaving a hideous
scar you were self-conscious about until someone… some crazy little fucker… laid his hands on it
and told you it was beautiful...

…and that crazy fucker of late being the only one whose opinion you seemed to care about….

whose rules you were prepared to follow (even though you'd always perceived rules as one of the
exasperating inventions ever)…

Whose methods to establish his rules left you on your knees and bleeding… not merely going along
with his tyranny, but loving it...

Who just had to say 'bedroom' to make your spine tingle and heat flare up in your groin, despite
having just had an orgasm ten minutes ago (chained to the bedpost, no less… and helplessly coming
all over his fucking 1500 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets)…

And who must be the only human on earth from whose mouth the plan to create an unassailable
criminal empire didn't sound like delusional megalomania, but like a worthwhile and totally feasible
project.

And he, Sebastian, was to be part of it. Because that unbelievable, intoxicating man wanted him
there...

professionally speaking, Moran! he thought, jerking himself back, and his eyes away from Jim who
was sauntering out of the room. He realised the cigarette had gradually smoldered down to his
fingers, but he quelled the impulse to just drop it, instead slowly grinding it into the bowl… and his
knuckle into the stub until the glow was snuffed out (and the tingly sensation where Jim's touch had
briefly lingered transformed into a searing pain that was strangely easier to deal with).

Then he got up as well and followed Jim to the bathroom. The shower was on full blast, and with
Jim still seemingly oblivious of his presence, Sebastian took the opportunity to just watch. First in the
mirror, running a glass of water, then turning around and leaning against the counter, methodically
counting out and downing his morning after pills - another dose of antibiotics and painkillers. And it
seemed like the most normal thing to do, at least after a night with Jim Moriarty. Sebastian was still
aware of the fucked-up insanity of all this, but - not particularly disturbed by it. Which in itself should
have been disturbing...
He stepped into the shower and for a moment he seemed about to touch Jim... and god, he wanted to. Wanted to run his hands along his neck, the curve of his spine, down to that beautiful taut arse, following the gleaming rivers of water and foam – but he just reached over Jim’s shoulder, plucking the bottle of shampoo out of his hand which was about to be replaced onto the shelf. He washed his hair, then moved into the spray, dipping back his head, eyes closed, with a low, blissful groan… just standing there, basking, and blocking the water - not deliberately, but also making no conscious effort to avoid it.

His collection of bandages was thoroughly soaked by now, but would have to be changed anyway...

~

Now why the hell did he invite Sebastian in for a shower? Last night was different... he needed to check his wound. But now? Well, he could check his wound after... he certainly wouldn't want to give the impression that this was for pleasure, when it was a strictly perfunctory shower. Jim did his best to ignore the large, muscular naked man who was staring at him and popping pills.

As Sebastian got into the shower, there was a marked difference in the level of spray. Jesus... his soldier seemed to take up most of the space, and it was by no means a small shower. When Jim had finished shampooing and conditioning his hair, he took the opportunity to sneak a peek at Sebastian, who was groaning with pleasure at the hot water.

He was definitely getting most of the spray, Jim thought in amazement as he watched the water stream over Sebastian's broad shoulders and down his muscular chest, his narrowing abdomen and, fuck, he was totally staring.

"Do I need to install another shower head if I want a decent amount of water ever again?" he asked pointedly, and pushed past Sebastian to rinse the conditioner out of his hair. He closed his eyes and let the water run over his head. Wait - what had he said??

Ever again? As in, this was going to be a regular thing - his employee joining him in the shower?? Oh, brilliant, Moriarty... Now what?

Well, luckily he didn't give a fuck about what people thought... and he could say whatever he wanted.

"That's assuming you receive another invitation..." he said archly.

Then he whispered, "Unruly Tiger..." as he slid past Sebastian again, pressing his pelvis against his
for a deliciously long moment before stepping outside of the shower to towel off.

~

Sebastian smiled. “Hmhm, hobbit-height,” he mumbled in response to Jim’s question about a second shower head. Gradually, completely relaxing down to his very bones, not even half his brain cells redeployed north (not that they’d been there much over the past day), he didn’t really think about what he’s said. Not about what he’d heard either, for that matter. Then he went still for a moment, realising both – but not turning his head or giving any indication he possibly could have heard Jim. Maybe if he pretended he hadn’t spoken, Jim might pretend he hadn’t heard?

Same as he was valiantly struggling to pretend to himself he hadn’t heard either - because what Jim had just said, implied that... oh Jesusfuckingfuck, no, nothing had been said! He would just ignore it, and the funny skip and lurch his heart had just done... that didn’t happen either.

He put his head into the full blast of the shower a second time, although he already had rinsed off the soap, as if that would help to drown out what he’d just surely misheard... Because (although signals had been a bit mixed), Jim hadn’t failed to point out repeatedly, this wasn’t anything Sebastian should have any misconceptions about. And, there it was: the disclaimer following immediately...

Of course Sebastian had been exaggerating: Jim wasn’t that short – he had a fucking perfect height … for pressing against him in passing - hipbone, thigh, cock... bare, soaking wet, hot... (No, that was not a moan, Sebastian had just taken a deep breath!)

He gave himself a bit of time to compose himself, before also leaving the shower. Jim was by now vigorously towelling off his hair, the lean, whipcord perfection of his muscles moving under smooth skin... Sebastian picked up a fresh towel, shook it open and... seemed to have forgotten what to do with it, still watching Jim. Then he dried himself off as well, starting with his head and face - a good strategy to hide it.

“And assuming I won’t?” he asked lightly. (Very good, Moran!). “Should London prepare for an ongoing series of mysterious club bombings?”

(He did manage to sound quite casual – well, a bit too much maybe, fuck -)

“And I supposed to just wank... till the end of my days?”

~

Jim froze for a fraction of a second, but managed to keep his face neutral – then he quickly changed his expression to cartoon-level shock, with eyes widening and mouth falling open in a silent gasp.
A drop of water from his still-damp hair rolled onto Jim's face, as if to punctuate his surprise.

He dropped his head forward and flung it back, unleashing a spray of water at Sebastian.

"Mysterious club bombings?" he asked idly. "Oh, I did hear something about that! Shame. These days, people really do need to be careful when they leave the house, right darling? All it takes is some lunatic with a bee in his bonnet to ruin everyone's evening of fun and frolic..."

He continued toweling off his hair, humming the melody to Disco Inferno.

As Sebastian continued to stare, Jim stopped humming abruptly. "Oh, you really want a conversation? Are you so lacking confidence in being invited back?" Again, he widened his eyes comically. "All right, Sebastian! You asked for it... let's talk, darling. But first - I need to check your wound and change your bandages."

Perfect. Now he didn't need to bring up the topic of the future, himself. He kept himself from laughing at Sebastian's barely-covered stricken expression, and slid against him seductively on the way to the medicine cabinet. He snatched up the necessary supplies, and looked at Sebastian pointedly.

"What are you waiting for? Turn around..." he said, sounding irritated.

He wasn't irritated in the slightest. Having a houseguest was so entertaining - well, *this one* was, anyway. *Housetiger*, he corrected himself, and pressed his lips together to keep from snickering.

~

Sebastian wiped off the droplets Jim had showered him with. Peeking around the towel he still got enough of a view of the immensely delightful – but also a bit frightening - look of utter shock being comically portrayed by Jim. He was still not owning up to being the cause of the club mayhem.

“Quite *something* to pull off,” Sebastian credited the allegedly unknown perpetrator. *As if!* As if anyone else could have concerted all the little mishaps, snares and disasters quite as ingeniously. Nevertheless he simply hummed, “Hm, must have been someone else then...”

Carefully reaching around and patting his back dry with the towel, around the swath of gauze and tape, equally carefully he considered whether he really wanted a *conversation* about the precarious topic of his future sex life. And no, he didn't lack confidence, he just had no idea what went on
within the endless layers of complexity behind those dark eyes, now scrutinizing him. Something as simple as 'Good fuck. Conclusion: repeat.'? Very probably not. He shrugged.

“Simple answer would suffice. And just hypothetically...” Like for instance had this just been an exercise of the Droit du seigneur by the King of the Castle to make a point? Which Sebastian wouldn’t have put past him...

When Jim mockingly widened his eyes, Sebastian realized he’d been staring back, his mind a jumble about all the possibilities... and the idea of this being a one-off was so distressing, he was infuriated at his response.

The little bastard lasciviously brushing past him didn't help, and Sebastian finally followed the slightly testy order and turned around, sitting down on the laundry basket again.

“I would have done it myself,” he murmured. “It's just a slightly impractical spot...” Jim cleaned and disinfected his signature and Sebastian kept as still as possible, while distracting himself a bit by unwinding the bandages from his wrists.

~

Jim looked at Sebastian’s wound, satisfied.

“Well, I can’t wait to see it when it’s healed, I do hope you’ll be pleased...” he said cheerily, as he applied fresh gauze and bandaging. “Now don’t go bragging to other criminal types about it, or they’ll all be jealous of Daddy’s attention...”

Sebastian had thrown away the bandages from his wrists, and was reaching for the disinfectant. Jim smacked his hand away, and took Sebastian’s hands in his. He looked at him for a long moment.

“I know you can do it yourself, Sebastian... I’m being a considerate host! When you cause sex-damage to your charming houseguest, it’s the least you can do...” He smiled wryly and held his gaze for a moment longer before examining his wrists.

“You do look like you’ve been up to something this weekend... something very naughty. Or possibly abduction, or a suicide attempt. There’s no way this is escaping Steve’s attention...” Jim smirked, and began to gently clean the scrapes on Sebastian’s wrists.
“Don’t be surprised if he guesses what’s happened the moment he sees us together, and asks you what the hell you think you’re doing. Say whatever you want about it to Steve, I don’t care. He can be trusted. Just don’t gossip with the other employees. Add that to the rules... I can get you a nice notebook, if you like?” He smiled as he disinfected the cuts, and then bandaged them up carefully.

“You’re done. I’m going to get something to eat, I’m starving...”

Jim went to the bedroom, pulled on clean black boxer briefs. He paused, looking at Sebastian’s gorgeous body. “If you must put something on, there’s a package of new underwear in the top drawer of the dresser. Versace. Très chic, darling! They’ll be a little tight for you, but... I don’t mind.” He smiled innocently and headed to the stairs. “Are you coming?” he called behind him.

~

Sebastian snorted softly.

“Oh good that you told me, or that's what I would've done, first thing Monday morning...”

He didn't look up from his fingers picking loose the bandage on his left wrist. Hiding his smile...

He was still aware how fucked up it was to not just be secretly pleased with having your back permanently disfigured, but even adoring the crazy artist for assuring you it was a unique piece.

He threw the sodden bandages into the bin, but then his hands were swatted away from what they were doing. Sebastian didn't object or resist when Jim literally arrested them - he just looked up and into his eyes.

Getting injured was part and parcel of his life. He was used to it. Normally the people inflicting the damage weren't the ones mending it... But the events of the last two days were so far removed from anything he'd ever experienced, they defied classification and any box labelled 'normal'. Same as the man in front of him - unlike anybody he'd ever met.

Unlike anybody. Period.

A corner of Sebastian's mouth curled upwards while he listened to Jim's gleeful description of his bruised, scraped up wrists, and the various speculations they might inspire.

“Suicidal sex-abduction?” he suggested. “I volunteered...”

Understatement of the century.
He kept still while Jim cleaned and re-bandaged his wrists, savoring every sting as much as every touch of these hands, so competent at dealing out everything from excruciating pain to searing pleasure... At the moment they were almost gentle.

Not that it hindered Jim from issuing more Rules.

But in this case – no, he did not plan to talk about this to anyone. Even though Steve having a go at him about what the hell he'd been up to might warrant some answer.

“Well, if we exceed Ten Commandments, I might need a notebook, yes,” Sebastian replied, grinning.

'Don't dawdle' seemed to be yet another one, so Sebastian just pulled out the package of briefs from the dresser drawer, as suggested... tore open the package and pulled out a new pair... Versace. Good God. He shook his head as he slid them on, and snickered at how much he must look like a high-end rent boy in his tight white designer briefs... then he followed Jim, who was already on his way down the stairs. The kitchen was indeed a very desirable destination. Breakfast had been not that long ago, but they had burned a good few calories since then...

~

Jim sauntered across the kitchen to the marble-top island and swiped up two apples from the bowl of fruit. He threw one to Sebastian, who caught it with his left hand. Then he pulled out a paring knife from the cutlery drawer and began to carve off pieces of apple. He popped them into his mouth, and regarded Sebastian.

"I'm going to do some work this afternoon... and you're welcome to stay as long as you like. There are books in the library, and I have various streaming services that I rarely use - if you want to see a film, or I don't know - binge-watch some clever crime series where the law enforcement officer always gets his man. And afterwards, well... we'll see what we're inspired to do."

Jim sliced a sliver of apple, and chewed thoughtfully. "Did I give the impression that I didn't enjoy myself, Tiger? You were still conscious for my orgasm, weren't you?" He sensuously licked juice from his hand, still looking at Sebastian.

"Like I said... London can be such a dangerous place these days. Personally, I prefer to stay in, and not go running all over the city." He smirked at the ceiling, as he threw the precisely pared apple core into the bin. "Anyway, I'm sure invitations to socialize will come your way... No point in fretting about the future when the present is a gift just waiting to be torn into..." he said innocently, his eyes flashing as licked the juice droplets from the blade before doing a fancy knife trick - spinning and twirling it with metallic sounds slicing through the air. He finished by throwing it into the cutting
board, and barely looked at it where it stood quivering in the block of wood.

~

Sebastian caught the apple which came flying his way and heartily sank his teeth into it. Meanwhile Jim started to dissect his apple with surgical accuracy.

“I’m sure I can find something to occupy myself with,” Sebastian agreed, mouth half full.

Then Jim swerved into another topic so abruptly, Sebastian briefly ceased chewing.

“You certainly didn't give the impression of not enjoying yourself...” With a pleased little smirk on his face, Sebastian resumed eating. “Quite the opposite.”

Yes, for all he could say, Jim had gotten quite carried away. (Christ, he could still feel it. There was a reason he was leaning against the countertop a bit sideways.) He wondered if anyone had ever heard such an intoxicating sound as that very sweet, nearly desperate whine from Jim Moriarty's throat.

But that was not the point in regards to the question he'd asked in the shower, which was still unanswered. But he was smart enough to just let it lie. Not keeping on about it but rather devouring what the present had to offer seemed like good advice. Speaking of which...

“Hang on – “ he said when Jim opened the bin. He threw in the slim core his apple after Jim’s pared down one. Sebastian took in the sight of Jim sinuously licking juice from his blade, and then, the surprising flurry of a knife trick that nearly made his head spin.

“God, I'm glad you waited till today for that trick,” he grinned looking at the knife quivering in the cutting board.

Then something else dawned on him. Did Jim regard the mission of 'getting something to eat' as accomplished? Seriously?!

He pulled the knife out of the wood and made a vague gesture towards the fridge.

“Okay... so if me prowling around a bit is fine, do you mind me starting there?”
He definitely remembered something being said last night about some leftover roast…

~

Jim blinked at him. "Of course. Help yourself..."

He watched as Sebastian opened up the fridge, began pawing through the catered contents, and started putting food out on the island.

And continued to do so.

He watched curiously as Sebastian eventually closed the door, and looked at the small mountain of food. Jim raised an eyebrow, and pointed to a cabinet.

"You're not just going to eat off the counter, are you? Plates and glasses are in there..."

He leaned against the counter instead of going off to get his laptop... Sebastian began the process of heating things up, slicing, seasoning, slathering with sauce, etc.

Jim heard an odd sound, and realised his stomach was growling. He was suddenly too ravenous to be self-conscious.

"Can you bring me some when you're done? It looks good," Jim said grudgingly. "With sparkling water." He wandered off, went upstairs to fetch his laptop and then set up camp on the living room sofa.

Only instead of doing work, he listened to the sounds of what was going on in the kitchen. Idly he wondered if the leftover roast that was on the counter would end up between two slices of bread.

*He's such a beast, *Jim thought. *MY beast...* 

His heart started to beat more quickly, Yes, Jimmy? And what's going to happen to your beast when you set him free in the wild?

Jim stared up at the ceiling, completely ignoring his laptop.

*I'm going to make him come back. And come hard. He will come to me - without question...*

And if there was a *little* question of how he would feel and what he would do if this plan didn't work, Jim wasn't about to think about that.
He didn't get to where he was by allowing for failure.

He sniffed the air at the delightful smell of Sebastian's afternoon 'snack', and waited for his own to arrive.

~

When it came to food, Sebastian wasn't picky at all. In the world he came from, you couldn't be. But he had eaten enough meals coming out of pouches or cans to last him a lifetime. He deeply appreciated anything which did not. Also you didn't need to be Bocuse to throw something simple together, especially when fridge and pantry were so well stocked - Chez Moriarty did not disappoint on any account.

He put out anything he might use - first and foremost, a very delicious looking lump of cold roast. Paring thick slices off it, he realised Jim was still lurking around, silently watching him. Well, not completely in silence... at least not as far as his stomach was concerned.

“That sounded a bit like an ungracious cat,” Sebastian observed with a grin, not even looking up from what he was doing. He finally did, while a batch of onion rings were frying in the pan.

“Is it possible, that sometimes you simply just forget to eat?” he asked, before turning towards the sink to rinse some vegetables. Was this the type of question you asked your boss? Then again, by now they knew considerably more... intriguing and intimate things about each other than eating habits.

The request to share the results of his labour was put forward politely, albeit grudgingly, and Sebastian smiled.

“That was the plan.”

Which was finally executed twenty minutes later.

The leftover roast – slathered with mustard, then topped with strips of fried peppers and onion rings, sliced tomatoes, pickles and lettuce - had indeed ended up between slices of bread. No normal person would probably be able to eat the slightly unwieldy object without literally unhinging their jaw, and still smearing mustard on their cheeks, or choking. Or messing up the carpet (God forbid). He briefly contemplated the problem, then rummaged through the drawers. When he finally carried Jim's plate into the living room, a fancy meat skewer had been pinned through the Moranese sandwich and held it together. With it came fork and knife for more cultivated eating, the requested glass of sparkling
water and (for lack of a napkin) a piece of tissue from the kitchen roll. He put everything down on the table in front of Jim.

“Here you go.” Then he got his own plate from the kitchen and settled down on the sofa on the other side of the table. Without knife or fork, and yep, he could eat the thing without dislocating his jaw. He took the first bite, his eyes half closing in rapture.

~

It smelled bloody delicious... more so than the hot catered meals that arrived regularly. More often than not, he ate half (if that), packaged them up, and tucked the rest in the fridge. This was the source of the many odds and ends that Sebastian had discovered. It would never have occurred to Jim to throw things together in this way, but he couldn't wait to sink his teeth into it.

Sebastian appeared, carrying a plate of food and a glass of fizzy water.

Jim watched as he put everything down on the table, then sat down opposite him and began to eat.

Jesus Christ, how are you fitting that into your mouth?? he thought in a daze, and then - Oh, I know what we have to squeeze in today. He took a tentative bite of an onion ring, then started waving his hand in front of his mouth, looking very unlike a criminal mastermind.

"It's hot," he yelped, sucking in his breath.

"Yes, it's right from the frying pan," Sebastian said, his mouth full.

Jim continued fanning his mouth, and gasping.

"Blow on it, next time," Sebastian suggested in a helpful tone. Jim narrowed his eyes. Was he trying not to laugh??

Jim poured half the glass of water into his mouth, then leaned back against the back of the sofa.

"You can blow on it later," he muttered.

He took up a forkful of peppers, and blew on them with exaggeration. Gingerly he took a bite and
then chewed.

"It's good," he said grudgingly.

As he ate, he watched Sebastian shove the ungainly sandwich into his mouth, one bite at a time.

"Didn't the House of Moran teach you how to eat like a gentleman?" he inquired. It was messy, it was not at all polite eating, but Jim couldn't tear his eyes away.

"Not that I'm complaining..." he said, taking another small mouthful. "A gentleman would never have been invited here..."

Sebastian was still chewing a large mouthful, and Jim thought in fascination, 'I could watch this man eat for the next month', and then in horror, 'what the fuck? where did that come from??'

~

If there was one man in the whole wide world who was not used to watching his tongue, it must be Jim, Sebastian thought while he methodically devoured his sandwich. His eyes sparkled with amusement, not at Jim's little mishap, but at the slightly peeved retort about whom the next blow job would fall to, before he deigned to admit he liked the improvised and somewhat unconventional meal Sebastian had thrown together.

“All part of the package,” he offered pleasantly, not even trying any more to suppress a grin, and deliberately not specifying further.

However, the mirth was wiped from his face by Jim's little jibe that the upbringing in the House of Moran might have had its shortcomings, especially regarding standards and discipline...?

“Oh, they taught me a lot of things,” he said flatly. “Especially my father… But yes, he also used to complain that it didn't take.” When Jim announced he didn't mind, Sebastian's only further comment on the matter was a terse “Good.”

He rearranged some of the contents of his sandwich that threatened to fall out and continued eating. Merely the way his shoulders relaxed again belied the subtle tension that had crept into him before. But he wouldn't let the old tyrant Moran spoil this day – which he was spending in the company of a much more delightful, fascinating and beautiful one. Sitting opposite him and eating most of the food he had on his plate. When Jim pushed his plate back, Sebastian reached across the table and using Jim’s fork, made short work of the leftovers before collecting everything to take back to the kitchen.
“Dessert? I believe there's ice cream in the freezer…”

~

"Sebastian, how is it you have a better idea of what's in my fridge than I do?" Jim said slowly. "You've been here less than a day…"

He made a comically shocked face. "Are you planning on moving in, then? Do I need to make up the spare room for you?" He tilted his head and looked at him pensively. "I will have some ice cream, and then I have work to do..."

He watched Sebastian's retreat back to the kitchen, and shook his head as he returned to his laptop. This whole day had been very surprising... he'd had a notion that he would be working on and off, vaguely aware of Sebastian's presence until he was ready to enjoy his body again. Then he'd snap his fingers and find Sebastian on his knees before him - facing towards him or away from him, depending on Jim's mood.

Instead he had only done a little work even though it was early afternoon. Mostly what he had done was slept in, eaten breakfast, whipped and fucked his bodyguard, had a shower with his bodyguard, and eaten the lunch prepared by his bodyguard. In short, he'd been aware of nothing but Sebastian's presence all day... it felt very much like having a Tiger wandering around the flat.

Even if the Tiger was somewhat tame or at least under your control, you couldn't help but be aware of the enormity of his body and his presence... as though his mind was regularly nudging him and reminding him, "There's a tiger in the bedroom! Now it's in the kitchen... and oh god, he's got onto the counter! Oh! Now he's gone and brought food into the living room!"

Jim snickered behind his hand.

"Something funny?" Sebastian called from the kitchen over the sound of dishes being loaded in the dishwasher.

'The tiger's back in the kitchen!' Jim thought, his shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Just Steve's schedule for bodyguards this week..." he called back. "I think he's taken it upon himself to 'handle' the situation, and keep you at a distance from me. If you prefer some distance, you can tell
him yourself. Otherwise, *my decision...*" Jim said testily.

He typed a terse response to Steve: 'No. Give Moran the following work this week: one hit (make it an easy one this week, then more challenging after that)… one job where he's in charge of men. The rest of the time he'll be on my personal detail.'

As he sent the message, a bowl of ice cream appeared before him. He blinked up at him, held out his hands before he'd realized it, and the bowl was placed into them.

'The Tiger got into the ice cream,' popped into his mind, and he smiled faintly.

~

Well, it was no particular feat to know your way around the freezer of *Chez Moriarty* better than its owner, whose interest in his own kitchen appeared to be rudimentary at best. Also, Sebastian *had* been invited to look around, hadn't he?

“Just recon, you know – like with any new territory,” he grinned. Apparently Jim's mood was seemingly too good to take offence that his abode was labeled as such. He even went along with the act.

“Hmm - spare room?” Sebastian mused with a grin. “With nuptial visits?”

Walking towards the kitchen he moved his head as if contemplating the scenario. Even though it had been a joke. They both knew it was, right?

As it turned out, Steve – good, honest man, and very perceptive – had made his own assumptions from the boss calling in a day off, not only for himself but his sniper as well. At the same time sneakiness was *not* Steve's resort, and his little trick glaringly obvious: separate the both of them as a sensible measure to keep the cogs of the universe turning smoothly.

Shutting the door of the freezer Sebastian said, “That won't be necessary.” Loudly enough to be heard in the living room, taking great care to sound light. Hiding that the mere idea of Steve's concocted work schedule felt like being threatened with corporal punishment (just *not* the *good* sort).
“Not on my account anyway…”

When he took the two bowls of ice cream to the living room and handed one to Jim he was met with a smile - unguarded, free of mischief and quite sweet.

*Fuck, don't get presumptuous, Moran,* Sebastian reminded himself, while he gingerly settled down onto the sofa again. Be content - you had a day off, got laid by the boss, and it was the best sex you've had in a long ti- No. *Ever.* Gingerly, he moved to the sofa, and instinctively avoided leaning his back against the upholstery – feeling not the least bit annoyed, but content.

While Jim eventually did immerse himself in his work and Sebastian cleared away the bowls and spoons, it struck him again how the intricate workings of an empire of crime were conducted from a living room sofa. By a man who could do more damage with a laptop between coffee and dessert, than Sebastian Moran could with an Uzi in a full week. (Although the jury was still out on what was more *fun.*)

After he got the dishwasher going, he made two coffees, placed one beside Jim, and, sipping from the other, wandered off.

In defence of his honour – for all that was worth - he could honestly claim that he'd *meant* to go straight to the library. But on his way he passed that door, and it had been ajar. (Well - might have been, slightly...)

The room was huge for a study. High windows flooded it with light and a view of the London skyline, while dark teak furniture oozed power and gravitas. And then – Sebastian turned around and just gawped. Spanning half a wall and several shelves was what must have been the most playful and complex Ruby Goldberg machine he'd ever seen. But he realized it a moment too late - *after* he'd touched a small iridescent marble ball, which had duly lost its balance and rolled down the paths of a translucent maze, setting the whole thing in motion irrevocably... Levers clicked, wheels spun, sand flowed into an hourglass, turning it, releasing a spring that struck a match which burned through a string that held... *fuckfuckfuck!!!* - how long did it take to reset the blasted thing? He had no idea how to stop it and so... he might just as well enjoy the spectacle, he thought - which gloriously ended with a tiny razorblade guillotine lopping the head off a mannikin which he could have sworn had more than just a passing resemblance to a certain queen...

Sebastian tiptoed out of the room and a minute later was virtuously ensconced on a sofa in the library, back to reading Capt. B. A. Combe's letters to his brother...
Someone's awfully chipper, Jim thought to himself, puzzled. From the corner of his eye he watched Sebastian go to work on his heaping bowl of ice cream. Is he always like this after getting laid? No, don't think of that! Fuck. Too late...

Jim sighed in annoyance, and shoved a spoonful of chocolate ice cream into his mouth. This was already getting complicated. What had he been thinking? Clearly, another part of him than his brain had been doing the thinking for him... why on earth did he invite him to spend the day?? Could they be acting more domestic?? Now he had a Tiger pawing through his fridge, frying up delicious meals and bringing him ice cream... he pushed another sweet, luscious spoonful into his mouth.

This was bad... very, very bad. And if he wanted to, he could rescind the invitation. Right now. Jim imagined the possibilities of how that would go... various expressions on his sniper's face - disappointed, (hurt), frustrated, (hurt), annoyedangryhurt...

*Fuck*...

Since when was somebody's reaction ever a factor for his behaviour? But it seemed to be, today... which was infuriating. Must be residual effects of the hottest - he considered this briefly - yes, the hottest sex he'd ever had.

Wellll, the *hottest sex ever* was problematic if it was going to make him go all soft, and consider his employee's feelings ... Hmm. How to avoid this in the future?

And obviously there would be sex in the future. They practically combusted when they touched. Or looked at each other. It was just all this other 'feelings' business that made things messy...

Jim realised he's been staring blankly at his screen, and angry-eating ice cream.

When he threw his spoon in the bowl, Sebastian looked up from the sofa. He got up, collected their bowls with a big smile, and carried them off to the kitchen.

(Awww... he's so sweet to have in the house...are we keeping him?) the little voice in his mind purred.

*Fuck's sake*... he barely managed to keep from cursing out loud. *We're not KEEPING HIM*...

(What? Why not?!) The voice turned downright petulant.

*Because! Look how distracting he's been already!*
(Oh relax, sweetie-pie... everyone's allowed to have a day off, aren't they?)

A day off... from what? he demanded. Being the one in control? The one with all the power? Are you fucking joking?

(Don't you want to just read or watch a film with Sebastian? It sounds fun! I never have fun!)

Being the one on top is fun... in bed, and in the world, too. Games are fun... playing with people's minds... and bodies... I have plenty of FUN, Jim thought loftily.

(Same old, same old! I want new fun! Go find Sebastian and hang out!)

Jim laughed loudly. Hang out? That's so cute... Now piss off, and let me finally do some work...

(If you get some work done, will you go see what Sebastian is doing?)

Fine, just a couple of hours.

(One.)

Jim gritted his teeth. One, he thought grudgingly, and settled down to work.

~

Despite the author's writing being highly enjoyable, Sebastian kept nodding off...

He'd made it through the battle of Sherpur, when the little cloth-bound volume, which had probably cost an arm and a leg, slipped from his hand and fell to the ground the first time. After the campaign of Char Asiab he caught it just in time before it gouged one of his eyes out, and it was then that he carefully closed and put it down beside the sofa. Well, there wasn't any shame in an afternoon nap... not after such a night and a good meal...

Once he'd heard Jim laughing in the sitting room and with a little smirk had wondered which poor
bugger's fate had just been sealed.

Jim had to work, but he did not, and for the first time he could see some advantages in not being the head of operations but a mere footsoldier. Usually the powers that be making plans did nothing for his peace of mind, quite the opposite. But here and now – it was different. Because with Jim Moriarty being the one hatching a scheme, it was no question it would be the smartest and most brilliant one imaginable.

Although the sofa had likely been chosen rather for the Downton Abbey flair it exuded than with someone of his size in mind, several cushions and a plaid rug made it easy to nestle into quite a comfortable position on his side, without cricking his neck and without too much disagreement of all his injuries. And while he still thought that despite everything it maybe was a shame to just sleep while he was here, he dozed off.

~

Jim was in the zone, strategizing, sending instructions, when suddenly he became aware of the time. Three thirty?? One and a half hours had passed. The day was almost over... the day with Sebastian was almost over. Jim felt a twinge of something... regret?

He glowered as he stared at the screen.

(You said you'd go see him after an hour... his inner voice said sulkily.)

Yes, I'm aware of what I said, he thought in annoyance. He stared at the screen a moment longer then snapped the lid shut.

Where was Sebastian, anyway? It was highly unusual that Jim would let someone just go wandering in his flat... but even stranger that he would have forgotten to think about it.

Jim got off the sofa and looked down in surprise. He was still wearing only boxer briefs...what had come over him today? I should really get dressed, he huffed and stared down the hallway. He padded towards the library.

On the way, he slowed down as he neared his study - and stopped as he looked at the door, slightly ajar. He would never have left the door ajar... would he??

He pushed the door open, and stood in the doorway scanning for subtle signs of entrance. There was nothing subtle about what he found. Aghast, he stared at the severed head of Queen Elizabeth in place in the Ruby Goldberg machine... he had been planning to run the machine on Lizzie’s
birthday, and now the *whole thing* would have to be set up again.

Jim's head swivelled and stared down the hall. He closed the door quietly, and walked quietly towards the library.

When he arrived, he stood and stared at Sebastian spread out on the sofa. One leg and one arm were hanging towards the floor. The next thing he noticed was that a book was on the floor, and Jim sucked in his breath.

His gaze snapped back to Sebastian, who was murmuring in his sleep.

Jim narrowed his eyes and advanced towards the sleeping sniper... then froze when he thought he heard his name... *did he say his name??*


Jim's mouth dropped open. Whatever was happening in that dream, he did *not approve*.

He sat on the back of the sofa, stared for a moment longer, then yelled "Sebastian!"

Sebastian started flying up but the size of the sofa being what it was, he fell to the floor. Eyes wild, he jumped up and surveyed the threat - Jim in his underwear, sitting on the sofa, knee crossed.

"Sorry darling, were you sleeping? I just had a teeny-tiny question... What did I tell you to do with closed doors? Was it... go into the room and play with whatever you find? Strange, that doesn't *sound* like something I'd say!"

Sebastian swore and sat heavily on the sofa, covering his face. "Jesus, Jim... I-"

"No," Jim snapped. "Nothing you could say is going to help your cause. If you can't use common sense, then what the hell are you *doing* here?"

There was that face... the one he saw in every possibility... annoyed... angry... hurt...

"Well! For your own safety, perhaps you should go," Jim said loftily, ignoring the pang that kept
trying to struggle through to the surface... there was that feeling again, Jim thought in a fury. And feelings were not welcome... he slid down from the back of the couch and stood in between Sebastian and the door.

He watched Sebastian slowly rise up, staring at him hard. Jim stared back intently.

Sebastian shouldered him out of the way, and Jim's mouth dropped open - yet again.

"What part of for your safety do you not understand?" Jim snarled, and stood in his way.

Then he threw himself at Sebastian, kissing him hard and possessively.

~

It was a shock that - literally – threw him.

He'd fallen asleep, as quickly as his body allowed itself to do only when he was in safe mode. It rarely ever misjudged, but this time apparently a stellar fuck up had happened.

Picking himself up off the floor, heart racing, Sebastian stared at Jim – he was nonchalantly lounging on the sofa Sebastian had just vacated in the most undignified manner. Nearly shaking from the backlash of a vicious adrenaline surge (which he hadn't even gotten the opportunity to enjoy...!), for a moment he was barely aware of what Jim was saying.

Something about broken Rules started to seep in – oh yes, the study – and also the gist of it being... that he should leave.

At some point during the riot-act-reading, Sebastian sat down heavily on the sofa, pushed his hands across his face and into his hair, caught his breath and tried to get a word in too, an apology, anything... it was dismissed before he could even get near it – and so he stopped trying.

He felt nauseated and upset, and then rankled about himself feeling upset. He forced some semblance of calm into his mind. Never mind Jim's reaction being bloody self-righteous and over-the-top, it was … Jim Moriarty right?

Your own fault if you lost sight of that for even a moment...

He had been lulled into thinking... whatever.

He reminded himself that yesterday he'd been quite certain to get thrown out anyway, after the
night's entertainments had ended - maybe just not as abruptly, and bit more politely, and not over such a trifling matter but… bloody hell! He knew how erratic and changeable the man was, right?!

Expecting anything - except the unexpected - was downright idiotic, and he probably should be content he'd made it this far - through breakfast, another shag, a pleasant lunch and a nap... So no, this shouldn't feel upsetting at all.

And yet he realized he was still staring at Jim, searching his eyes, his face, for anything that said he wasn't serious. (Oh how pathetic, Moran, for fuck's sake - don't look at him like a lost puppy...!)

But no, there wasn't anything of the sort, except annoyance about broken Rules and...

disappointment.

Then the moody, unnerving little fucker was telling him to go and at the same time getting up and blocking his way to the door.

Sebastian stood, drew himself up, and made a good effort to not let it show how miserable he felt.

He realised he might have given up a big chunk of his fucking pride last night, surrendered it willingly in a room smelling of fire and blood and sex, laying it down at Jim's feet, never ever to be reclaimed… but there still was some left.

And that remaining pride wouldn't have him plead, or storm out of the room like a scorned bride, or navigate cautiously around the man standing in his way. He just pushed passed him, clenching his teeth because he nearly couldn't keep going, as soon as their skin made contact –

There were games Sebastian was willing to play, and very few he would not… like the one that seemed to be unfolding when suddenly, Jim was in front of him again, snarling and dangerous... and then -

What the f...?!

It felt more like a vicious beast jumping him than a kiss, and Sebastian welcomed it, embraced it, the beast and the kiss both... teeth, tongue, claws...

Just as ferociously, one of his hands clasped the nape of Jim’s neck, and one grasped his arm. His stance and center of gravity shifted imperceptibly, then his right foot hooked behind Jim's ankle. Who, in the next instant, was jerked off his feet by a take-down move straight from basic training. It landed him on his front, hard – but not as hard as it would have had Sebastian followed through with his full strength and weight. Jim still ended up pinned down, immobilised by two hands and a knee digging into the small of his back. Sebastian crouched over him, leaning close.

“Good of you to warn me about my safety,” he whispered into Jim's ear, “but believe me, one bloke in his underwear blocking my path is a manageable threat.” He breathed in Jim's scent, and god, the man drove him from zero to one hundred in all sorts of ways.
Sebastian was barely able to pull himself away, but after a brief, sharp nip at Jim's neck he eased his grip, and also his weight off his back.

And if he was to be thrown out now, or skinned and eviscerated, or fired, he'd at least made it worthwhile...

~

Jim found it strange to suddenly be on the floor... pinned down... whispered to... and yet not reacting viscerally like he would have expected. After the initial surge of fury and panic, he relaxed - and he realised the reason was... around Sebastian Moran, he felt safer than with anyone he had ever met.

However, this didn't mean he was OK with his bodyguard/lover - shut the fuck up, he snapped at his own mind - manhandling him.

(Oh, please - of course it's what you want!) the inner voice purred.

Jim felt fury building in him, both at his own traitorous mind, and at Sebastian.

So when he was released, possibilities streamed through his mind. And he decided on the one that looked like the most fun.

He rolled over, and sat up. He held his head, wincing, and struggled to get up. Sebastian immediately moved towards him, reaching out in concern. Jim took the opportunity to grab his arms, pull him forward, and then kick him in the abdomen. It was hard enough to throw him back - and Jim took advantage of the momentum and surprise to fly at him and shove him against the bookshelf. Piles of books that had been pulled out by Sebastian flew loose and showered down around them. They both hunched over in surprise and covered their heads. When the books stopped falling, they looked at each other, breathing hard.

Jim glowered, and pushed his face close to Sebastian's. "Jesus fucking Christ! Are you capable of not marking your territory in every fucking room you enter?" he growled. He pulled Sebastian's head towards his, and kissed him fiercely.

Then Jim stepped back, and backhanded him hard across the face. "You know what that was for..." he hissed. "Go on... Try me again, honey..." His last words held warning and danger, but also a hint of silky seduction.
Interesting, Jim thought, feeling his heart pounding. *Very interesting*...

With a furious glare, he pressed hard against his soldier’s body, and captured his lips with his own in a lusty, devouring kiss.

~

It wouldn’t have been the first time Sebastian had inflicted more damage than he actually intended (in this case – none), and so he cursed himself silently while he darted forward to steady Jim, who struggled to his feet as if in a daze. Fuck fuck fuck -

Ffff... With a grunt Sebastian doubled over, stumbling and badly winded before his mind and even his reflexes had caught on to Jim's move, which had yanked him forward and right into a kick. He was hellishly, unbelievably quick. Momentarily convinced he was about to get reacquainted with his lunch, he had just enough time to be grateful Jim had not aimed lower, when the little devil swooped in again and pushed him against the shelving. Only the resulting hail of falling books separated them, like two fighting cats if a pail of dishwater was thrown from an upstairs window.

The temporary ceasefire over, Jim got into his face again, growling. Sebastian snorted, bristling at being scolded like a newly acquired, ill-behaved pet, but then a grin started to tug at the corners of his mouth, gradually revealing more and more teeth.

Well, there *was* blood on two sets of sheets, the smell of fried bacon in the kitchen, a touch of disarray in the library, a decapitated monarch in the study…

“Makes the place feel a bit more lived-in, don’t you think?” he purred. He still grinned into the fierce kiss, before everything was knocked sideways again - including his own perception of himself as he just took the backhand blow across his face, because... throwing the boss to the ground was a transgression of the first order. He only thought, *good aim,* as his lip was bleeding yet again. He got a glimpse of Jim's eyes, furious, dark, exhilarated, ... *high,* and it was exactly how he felt too, when - Sebastian grabbed and pulled Jim who was pushing him into the bookcase again, and they threw themselves into another kiss: greedy, breathless, stinging like a bitch and utterly… delicious.

But since there was an invitation here that he would never let go unanswered, Sebastian seized the opportunity, and Jim too - he caught one of his wrists and his neck in the crook of his elbow, shifted to the side a bit and pushed forward. On his guard this time, Sebastian was also much too close for knees and kicking feet to be effective. He dragged Jim with him, who had to do a quick shuffle backwards if he didn't want to lose his footing. Several times they almost tripped over the assorted pricey literature on the floor, before they hit the back of the sofa and Sebastian let go, tipping Jim over it.
One moment Jim was being the aggressor, the next he found himself being pushed over the back of the sofa. He landed on the seat with a muffled thump, and Sebastian quickly followed.

Jim found himself in the surprising position of staring up at someone, while his body was pressed against his.

You brought this on yourself, he thought, fuming. Try me again?? Jesus... what did you think would happen??

Options:
- hurt Sebastian and get up from sofa. (No. Something else.)
- let Sebastian do whatever the hell he wants. (No? No.)
- take over. For the moment. (Yes. That one...)

He had to admit, he was curious about Sebastian taking over... It had been a very long time since anyone had taken the lead with him, and... sometimes it was like an itch needing to be scratched. (Even for someone who didn't want to itch, and was just fine with not-itching...)

But he wasn't about to just give it to him... he needed to earn it.

Jim squirmed out from under Sebastian and moved like quicksilver to climb on top of him. He straddled the man, noting how his thighs felt pressing against Sebastian's. He leaned down over him and growled, "Oh well played, Tiger... what do you propose we do now? Duel at dawn? I think I have a pair of leather gloves I can dig up to slap you with..."

Sebastian grinned up at him, and in shock, Jim found himself grinning back.

What are you doing? he barked at himself. Take control! Restrain him! Anything could happen!!

"Fucking Tiger..." he muttered. He stared at him in annoyance, and entered the outlandish situation of kissing a completely unrestrained Sebastian.
Jesus, he savoured every moment of it - their little tussle, and having the freedom of his hands, and movements – knowing, and accepting, it was a temporary concession. Which could end with a snap of a finger or a mere word, without Sebastian questioning it...

But until then – he was going to make the most of it, and enjoy it.

From what he could feel, someone else was enjoying this too, while at the same time being considerably annoyed?

Even enough to contemplate a duel? With a spike of heat zinging through him, Sebastian wondered if, the other day in the car, he had been caught staring at Jim’s leather gloves. Indeed, he knew said gloves so well he could have described them in detail. He tried – quite unsuccessfully - to replace his grin with a sober expression, as if considering picking up the gauntlet.

“I don’t think I would derive much satisfaction out of shooting you…” Clearing his throat, he suppressed a laugh and kept a straight face. “Sir.”

He could have thwarted Jim’s efforts to extricate himself from underneath Sebastian and reverse their positions, but he didn’t really try. The muscles of his thighs tensed subtly as he pressed his hips and his hardening cock upwards against Jim, who sat astride him. Nothing had happened yet that signaled that the invitation had been revoked, and so Sebastian didn’t just kiss back, but also, slowly sat up… His right hand traced the contour of Jim's biceps, up to his shoulder, to the back of his neck, curled around it... Their breathing got harsher, and still they didn't break the kiss. By now Jim had to lean slightly backwards, and still... no objection.

Sebastian's left hand snaked between them, massaging the erection it found there, straining against Jim's briefs. He made a low, predatory noise in his throat and let his tongue slide against Jim’s – just as slowly and teasingly as he dragged his thumb across the small damp spot in the fabric.

Jim became dimly aware that he was moving back as Sebastian raised himself up, and pressed his cock against his pelvis.

When he felt Sebastian's hand fondling him through his pants, Jim barely managed to keep himself from moaning aloud. God, it had been so long since anyone had touched him - and they had never really actively touched him, unless they were being ordered to blow him.
Jim listened to the sound that was rising from Sebastian's throat... he really was like a predator, he thought in a daze. Then his thumb moved over his cock, and Jim did moan.

He also broke off the kiss, and held Sebastian's face in his hands. Panting, he said, "Lube is in the drawer of the nightstand. Go get it..."

Sebastian groaned and got up, looking dazed and grumpy. Jim flopped back against the sofa, resting his head in his hands.

"It's good to be King," he said in a lazy voice.

As Sebastian went through the door, Jim called out after him, "Remember, Tiger - no going into rooms with closed doors to rearrange furniture or paint a fucking mural, I don't care what you feel inspired to do..." He looked smug as he crossed one leg over the other.

~

God...

That … sound!

Compared to the other noises Sebastian had already been treated to, Jim's moan was but a small one - but it wasn't just a testimony of Jim simply taking his pleasure. It was something he had drawn from him, and it made Sebastian absolutely dizzy… only coming back to his senses when Jim looked at him, gorgeously flushed, and ordered him to... what?

Sebastian groaned in protest, but then got up.

To be told to go fetch the lube made him even harder, but a trip to the upstairs bedroom felt like a journey too far and too absurd to even contemplate.

Wasn't there anything else they could...?

No. At the moment, and even though he seemed quite a sucker for pain, he'd rather not.

Halfway out the door and without turning his head he just waved as a sign that he remembered the closed-door-directive.

And he didn’t bother assuring Jim that the chances of him getting sidetracked were pretty slim at the moment.
And yet – it nearly happened. He couldn't resist flipping through the copy of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, on top of the nightstand. Unlike the one on the coffee table downstairs, it looked quite dog-eared and well-read. It had annotations and scribblings in the margins, as well as little doodles of skulls and stick figure corpses with x-eyes, drawn in a manner that had Sebastian nearly in stitches.

Inside the drawer he found the bottle of lube quickly enough, amidst a collection of mundane, sweetly ordinary things – lozenges, earphones, a pack of tissues, a knife, a little notebook and pen, and a Beretta Nano with a spare mag. There was also an opera ticket stub from 2005, a dart flight that looked downright ancient and a little toy figure - no, several – there were fearsome looking creatures and one little boy in a wolf onesie and a crown...

*It's good to be King.*

Coming back to the library, he took in the sight of Jim, unabashedly sprawling on the sofa. Lean and beautiful, head flung back against the arm-rest. His half-closed eyes were watching him as he walked over and dropped the little tube beside him.

“Should I've brought the cherry pit pillow as well?” Sebastian teased. He leaned over Jim, his hands planted next to Jim's shoulders, nudging his knees apart and settling down between them in a subtly predatory manner, but also leaving himself open to any blow or kick to the solar plexus, should that be Jim's reaction.

And then he kissed him.

For the first time, since he'd entered this flat and the Rules had been put into place…

Without being *given permission*… completely of his own accord.

*There might be consequences.*

There were *always* consequences.

Right now, Sebastian didn't care one whit what they might be.

~

When Jim saw Sebastian's face drawing closer, he felt strangely powerless to stop him. He just continued staring at him hard, and not - stopping - him -
until Sebastian was kissing him, and... Jim *still* wasn't stopping him.

He told himself at first it was out of curiosity - after all, he hadn't done much *kissing* in his life, unless it was called for in playing a role, or far less frequently, in dominating someone.

But he had tried that with Sebastian, and somehow it kept leading to kissing for the sake of *kissing*... which was completely outlandish and made no bloody sense.

And yet.

Well. It was bad enough to spend the day snogging his employee on and off, but... now his employee was snogging *him*? What part of the Rules had he not been clear about? he thought, fuming. Should he *punch* him this time for this flagrant transgression? Shove him onto the floor and kick him? No - apparently the correct response was to *allow* it without repercussion, and... *kiss him back*?

(Oh chill out, Jimmy…) his inner voice snapped. (I *like it*. And I'm *not* fucking stopping.)

For once, he was shocked silent. He felt lips moving against his, and Sebastian's tongue easing into his mouth. Jim's hands moved to the back of Sebastian's head, and curled into his soft hair.

He felt himself grow limp with pleasure under Sebastian's body sliding over his. Jim moaned as felt Sebastian's lips against his. And with this, his eyes flew open. His control returned like a metal gate slamming into place.

His hands tightened in Sebastian's hair and he pulled his head back roughly. Jim gazed at him for a long moment with blazing eyes. Then he slowly pushed Sebastian's head down towards his cock.

~

*Only stipulation is I lead, you follow. Understood, soldier?*

*Of course* he remembered…

*Understanding* rules had never been his problem. Observing them was…

And for a few sweet seconds *he did* have the lead...

It was sublime, intoxicating. How Jim's lips - sensual, commanding, cruel - were just soft and responsive, kissing back... parting slightly for Sebastian's tongue. For a moment there wasn't the even a hint of objection, and a slight shift in position even allowed Sebastian to come closer, and closer... Jim uttered a low moan when their bodies made contact, something radiating off him like stunned
disbelief, but above all a wave of unchecked, if slightly dazed pleasure.

Then his eyes snapped open, black with fury, and everything crashed back into place. The hands in Sebastian's hair tightened and yanked his head back. Keeping it there with a grip that made his eyes sting while he stared back, teeth bared in a fierce-smile-silent-snarl.

The direction of the slow, inexorable push that followed was unmistakeable. It was also highly appealing and Sebastian went with it, just as slowly. Hands moved over Jim's shoulders, down his chest, his sides... gradually curling, so before arriving at their destination his nails started to leave reddening lines in their wake...

If there was any displeasure, it seemed to be appeased as Sebastian mouthed the straining erection through the fabric, finding that delightful spot again, breathing deeply.... god... He pressed his tongue against it... and smirked as someone seemed to be getting impatient. He'd already hooked his fingers under the waistband of the boxer briefs and their owner helpfully lifted his arse a bit, so Sebastian could pull them down, freeing a very beautiful, and very interested cock.

Christ, he was gorgeous... Not that Sebastian didn't already know, but he'd neither been this close yet nor in any position to take in the full show, let alone do with it as he wanted – suddenly the hand in his hair twitched testily. Just looking was not appreciated? Sebastian smiled and in turn the fingers of his hand on Jim's thigh dug in briefly – a remaining hint of insubordination, while he settled down on his haunches, giving off the air of a man who had all the time in the world and would Not. Be. Rushed.

He dipped his head further, his tongue teasingly running along the underside of Jim's cock up to the tip, tasting the light, sharp, heady tang of arousal. Then he did it again, his hand cupping Jim's balls, and he took his sweet time, as though... mapping out territory - his tongue sliding against taut, warm, silky skin and pressing against the hardness underneath, tracing the ridges and veins... And when he finally closed his lips around the head and started in earnest, he was briefly grateful he already was on his knees, as he felt a wave of dizziness. Taking in that beautiful cock, he could feel all dispensable brain functions shutting down except the most primal ones and he groaned - that scent and taste something he wanted to roll in, and rub against, and if he wasn't asked to come back could he get some of it bottled to take with him, please??

~

God, the look Sebastian gave him when he pulled his hair back... Jim thought he could replay it in his head endlessly and never tire of it. Sebastian seemed to come alive when things got rough, which made the energy between them spark and sizzle like a live wire... because if there was one thing Jim liked, it was playing rough... too often people’s responses were disappointing, which just made him furious.
Sebastian hadn’t disappointed... *ohh*, quite the contrary! Every time he responded to an intense stimulus - be it physical or psychological - Jim just felt more drawn in by him, more... *fascinated*, he realised with a shock.

Which was a problem, because where would that *lead*? How does one become more and more fascinated by someone without growing dependent... or *weak*?

Well, there would be time to consider this when Sebastian left. It was absolutely *not* the time to think about while his soldier's mouth was heading towards his cock.

Jim watched, entranced. He suppressed a wince when he felt nails digging into his skin. *Careful, darling*, he thought, annoyed - but he couldn't suppress a shiver.

Because now Sebastian’s tongue was pressing against the fabric of his briefs. And he seemed to be taking his sweet time... Oh, Jesus... *just do it*, he thought, desperately.

Finally Sebastian was removing the barrier between them, but still not *doing anything*. Jim stared down in irritation.

*I know it’s beautiful*... That’s why you *suck it*, he wanted to shout.

His hand pulled at Sebastian’s hair, and he felt nails dig into his thigh. Jim glared down at him, ready to snap. But the rapt expression on Sebastian’s face was totally unexpected and Jim found himself surprisingly... *charmed*.

Ok, don’t get carried away, he told himself. *It is* a gorgeous cock. *Of course* he's admiring it...

But Sebastian had gone far beyond admiration, and seemed to be approaching it as one would go exploring a mythic land one had accidentally discovered after tumbling into a rabbit hole. A land that he was apparently getting a lot of pleasure from, going by his reactions... When Sebastian groaned, Jim's head fell back and his eyelids fluttered shut.

*Fuck*, he thought, beginning to pant. No past blow job had *ever* felt like this... and how could any future blow job even hope to compare?? Jim had the unsettling sensation of tipping over and falling down a long dark tunnel, but this was soon overwhelmed by intense shivering and loud moaning. *Was that me?* he thought faintly, and then he was arching his back, digging his fingers into Sebastian's hair and shuddering violently.

"Oh god," he gasped. "Ohmyfuckinggod..."
Yes, it was the most beautiful cock he'd ever laid his eyes - and mouth - on, but above all: it was Jim's, and Sebastian revelled in it like something utterly delicious you've tasted for the very first time – the weight, the throbbing heat, and even more so, Jim's reaction - no caustic bitching and sing-song observations from above anymore, just harsh breathing and panting, and Sebastian savoured every moan, every appreciative hiss and soft curse...

Never stopping his ministrations, he treated himself to a brief glance upwards – taking in the glorious sight of the man, back arched, head thrown back, that strong, beautiful white throat, just now swallowing heavily, at a particularly naughty flick of Sebastian's tongue...

God, Sebastian wanted to do this for hours, filing away every reaction as exquisite memory (and useful information), but he also wanted... more of this magnificent cock. He took it deeper... damn, he should have practised more often...

Not that he never went down on anybody, but it had always been a means much more than an end in itself, a pleasant thing to do to help him get what he really wanted, or when a little reciprocation seemed in order.

He'd never experienced it to be such an incredible turn-on. About which he even felt a bit flustered, with no idea whether it was that element of submission that got him, or that at the same time he felt powerful beyond measure. He groaned in arousal as the telltale tremors running through Jim's body turned into shivers, and slightly dug his nails into his thigh again... - just hold off for another sec will you? - because he wanted...

Well, amongst other things he didn't want to gag... Luckily being with Jim Moriarty seemed to make him quite adept at overriding natural reflexes…

There. Tricked this one too.

And it earned him a gasp and a half-shouted curse and then... the intoxicating feeling of Jim bucking, shuddering, coming -

Sebastian swallowed every last drop, and when he finally released Jim and came up for air, his eyes slightly swimming, he felt half-delirious, and tremendously pleased. And definitely a bit smug.

~

Right in the midst of the ecstatic shivering that was overcoming him, Jim felt himself look at the scene as though an impartial observer.
He saw a tall, muscular man with golden hair leaning over a smaller man, pleasuring him mercilessly... and staring at him so intently.

The smaller man was pale, lean, compact... and having a complete meltdown, from what it looked like - head thrown back, mouth open, moaning and gasping for breath...

Jesus, he thought snidely. Play a little hard to get, at least...

Suddenly he was flung back into his body which was shuddering and jerking violently against Sebastian.

He heard a loud cry, and then felt himself dissolve into a shivering mess.

Fuck... fuck...

oh god...

He had come undone... completely undone...

and he had to come back together in the same order, quickly... didn't he?

At the moment, he didn't give a fuck.

He panted on the sofa, eyes closed. He half-opened them to see Sebastian staring at him with a smile - actually more of a smirk.

Jim put his hands behind his head with a nonchalance he didn't really feel. "That was... mmm."

He looked up at the ceiling. "But you don't have to look quite so smug..." he sighed - then smiled. "Now that I know how talented you are... I intend to put that impertinent mouth to good use..."

~

Sebastian smiled back sweetly.

“Just enjoying myself.”

And Jim clearly had, too. His face slightly flushed and the hair at the back of his head mussed, the man on the sofa looked considerably less aloof and composed than he had a few minutes ago, when Sebastian had entered the room and dropped the lube onto the sofa - … oh yes, that... He managed not to look at it. He also tried to not think about his own cock…
Sitting on his heels, he wriggled a bit and settled into an easier and more comfortable position. Looking at Jim, there was nothing in the world that could wipe that pleased, mesmerised grin off his face. And then, his mind just blanked, when Jim's last sentence sunk in, because it definitely sounded like... a reference to things to come, and surely he didn't just mean the rest of the day?

“Does that mean...?”

_Oh fuck - shut it, Moran!_

“Never mind,” he murmured, lowering his head down to Jim's crotch, his softening cock, and, lightly running the tip of his tongue over the velvety skin, paid another compliment to it. Then, pulling up the waistband of Jim's briefs, he suavely tucked it away again.

~

Jim stared at Sebastian as he lay back comfortably against the cushions. Does that mean _what_, darling? he thought, satisfied. You're dying to know if I want you after today... aren't you. Oh, this had worked out _very well_...

He looked questioningly at Sebastian, with a small smile playing on his lips.

(Now the only thing is... how are you going to stop him from sleeping with _anyone else_...?) his inner voice fretted.

_Quiet_, he ordered. _Last night and today was supposed to get all that out of my system, remember?_

(Well, it _didn't work_... so what are you going to _do_??)

_What I do best, darling... bend the world according to my will._

He watched as Sebastian gave a farewell lick of his cock. Jim inhaled slowly. Then his pants were neatly back in place, and Sebastian looked down him with a smile.
Jim huffed out a breath, sat up and crawled slowly over him. Sebastian lowered himself against the sofa as Jim pressed down against his body. He stared down at him for a long moment before sliding his fingers past the waistband of his boxer briefs. He yanked them down, pulled them off his legs, and threw them to the floor.

"I don't know that you deserve this after such questionable behaviour," he said in a silky voice. "But I don't see why I should deny myself the pleasure..."

Then he cupped Sebastian's arse in his hands, lowered his mouth down to his cock, and began to slowly, expertly fellate his soldier.

~

Approval, annoyance, amusement...? Sebastian wondered whether there was anyone who could read what was going on behind these dark eyes – and every time they stared at him, into him, whatever was responsible for self-preservation seemed to stir, but by now only just twitched, as if in restraints... Even when physically... there were none. And every time it happened, that reaction became weaker.

Now it was a mere movement from Jim, sitting up, crawling over him, that had Sebastian sink back. Slowly enough to get the most out of Jim's body deliciously pressing against his... (Absurdly, the sofa which seemed to be too small for him on his own, was perfectly fine to accommodate the two of them together).

When his briefs were removed and Jim's head disappeared, downwards, Sebastian's brain sputtered to a halt, abandoned, the skeleton crew of about three cells relaying their conclusion that to bury his hands in Jim's hair might qualify – again – as questionable behaviour. So, like a man drowning, he found the next best thing to hold onto, digging his fingers into the upholstery of the sofa. With a half-choked gasp he welcomed the mouth on his cock as much as the hands on his arse, sliding over the weals and welts the cane had left last night.

~

Jim tried not to get too carried away as he was sucking Sebastian's cock - beautiful though it was. There would be time enough for appreciating the taste and scent and feel - focus, Jim!!

He listened closely for sounds of pleasure, and was not disappointed. When gasps gave way to loud groaning, Jim dragged his mouth from his soldier's cock and sat back on the sofa. Sebastian's eyes opened and he blinked at him in confusion.

"Now... what to do with you, darling..." Jim said in a lazy voice. "I could just reciprocate, but...
that the way to deal with an insubordinate Tiger who transgresses against the rules?" Jim tapped his fingers against his lips, and pretended to be deep in thought. His eyes narrowed. "I think not."

He watched with satisfaction as Sebastian's face grew incredulous.

Jim crossed one leg over the other. "And since you seem to want an invitation back, the only possible solution is to answer to that transgression. You didn't think a beautifully executed blow job was going to smooth everything over, did you?"

Jim took Sebastian's face in his hand. "Oh, darling... we haven't even scratched the surface yet. Get up."

Sebastian hesitated only briefly before standing.

Jim stared up at him with glinting eyes. Slowly he stood up and drew closer to Sebastian until there were only inches between them.

"What are you waiting for, Tiger? You know where I want you..." He pressed against him, dragging his fingers up his thighs. Then he pushed past him and left the library.

He heard Sebastian padding behind him as he went down the hallway... up the staircase, and back into the dungeon.
Squeezing his eyes shut, Sebastian let his head fall back against the armrest and groaned - a noise of deepest frustration.

Had he really thought a blowjob would make everything fine and dandy?

He muttered something about how one could always hope - but apparently he could still trust his instincts - at least when they told him something was too good to be true.

He stared up into Jim's eyes, his pulse accelerating even more. Well, his surface had been scratched considerably already… so to hear that this was just the beginning had him dreading, and at the same time craving, the return to that room.

The craving won easily.

Sebastian followed Jim up the stairs and through that door...

~

Jim smiled and hummed to himself as he opened the door and walked in. He waited until Sebastian appeared, and shut the door behind him with a thump.

"Let's try something different - lie down there," Jim said cheerfully, pointing at a piece of multi-use equipment that had a padded red bench to lie on and different restraints, open and just waiting for a body.

~

Sebastian's mouth went dry when he eyed the piece of ‘furniture’ Jim pointed out. He walked over slowly, but didn't hesitate. The question as to why he kept doing this didn't even arise anymore, not after he'd stepped through the door... Inside this room, all the rules were already in place, as firmly as the restraints that would secure him momentarily.

In here, pleasure and pain were inextricably linked - one didn't even seem to exist without the other any more. Each time Jim took him into this room, it was another step further down that path, and Sebastian went along like someone discovering the promised land, recognising it as something he'd been searching for, without knowing it...

~
Sebastian lay down gingerly, and Jim took his arms and fastened them into place above his head. He fastened cuffs around his ankles. Then he stood over Sebastian, looking pleased.

"And here you are at my mercy again... " he said. "If we're not careful, it could become a habit," he said archly, but as he walked away, there was a sly smile on his lips.

He went to the cabinet, and a moment later the room swelled with opera - Puccini's *O Mio Babbino Caro*.

Jim strode dramatically through the room, and back to Sebastian. He held up a dagger as though it were the subject of Kiri Te Kanawa singing her heart out. Then moving like quicksilver, he slashed at Sebastian's upper thighs, right below where they met with his pelvis. Very small slashes, but ever so slightly deeper than last night.

He placed the dagger on a gleaming black table with a flourish - then raising his arms and face heavenward to the swelling music, he slowly sank down to his knees.

Jim licked the small wounds with pleasure, then flicked his tongue at Sebastian before sliding his mouth over his cock once again and beginning to suck.

~

Sebastian had never pictured himself bleeding out from his femoral artery to the poncy soundtrack of Italian opera… but in this very moment it did not seem an entirely impossible scenario.

He didn't flinch, partly because he was fairly certain that killing him was not what Jim had in mind, and partly because he didn't want Jim to nick anything important. But Sebastian realised with an unspeakable thrill that with Jim Moriarty you could never be entirely sure - of anything.

The quick, searing nicks of the blade were laying a heady melody over the more deeply pulsing pain in his back, pressed against the bench. The barely audible hiss that were drawn from him prompted a feral smile from Jim – lips and tongue red with blood. But this was nothing compared to sounds Sebastian made when he felt those lips and tongue on his cock again.

~

Jim took his time, as Sebastian had... getting to know the beautiful cock under his lips, with each stroke with his lips, each swirl of his tongue... every time Sebastian gasped or groaned or shivered, it was catalogued for future reference.

Jim wanted to be able to undo him if needed...
He made a purring sound in his throat, and Sebastian moaned loudly. Shivers were moving quickly through his body, and Jim slowed down abruptly. Sebastian made a frustrated noise.

Pleased, Jim listened to the lyrics as the song drew to a close.

Mi struggo e mi tormento!

O Dio, vorrei morir!

Babbo, pietà, pietà!

Babbo, pietà, pietà!

I am pining, I am tormented!

Oh God, I would want to die!

Papa, have pity, have pity!

Papa, have pity, have pity!

Jim thought back to translations he had seen referring to the song as *Oh my dear Daddy* instead of *Oh my dear papa*, and he grinned around his soldier’s hard cock. Given Sebastian’s haughty upbringing, he wondered if his dear soldier would know the translation as well.

“Remember, Tiger... no coming without permission...” Jim panted, staring at hm with half-closed eyes. “Say it for me, darling...”

There was a pause and Jim dug his nails into Sebastian’s thighs.

“Oh no... we’re not being recalcitrant, are we? After how far we’ve come...?” Jim tsked sadly.

Carl Orff’s *O Fortuna* poured into the room, and his eyes gleamed with pleasure.

*O Fortuna*

*Velut luna*

*Statu variabilis,*

*Semper crescis*

*Aut decrescis;*
vita detestabilis
nunc obdurat
et tunc curat
ludo mentis aciem

O Fortune,
like the moon
you are changeable,
ever waxing
and waning
hateful life
first oppresses
and then soothes
as fancy takes it

Jim grinned and crossed his arms.

“Saaay it,” he sang. “Or do you want Daddy to be cross?”

~

Yes, he'd had Jim's mouth on his cock before, briefly, teasingly, and this alone had nearly been enough to drive him to distraction... so when now Jim put himself to the task with real dedication... it felt like being picked apart and unravelled thread by thread in a way that had Sebastian helplessly tumbling towards a major meltdown... his mind just as much as his body.

Then - Jim slowed down, as though taking his cue from the opera piece fading out, and he definitely seemed to enjoy Sebastian audibly sliding from frustration into something bordering desperation...

Of course Sebastian remembered the imperative rule – no coming without permission - and fuuuck, by now he was ready to say anything to make Jim continue. And yet, creeping into his ragged breathing was a growl and whatever he was about to utter was cut off and torn to shreds by teeth clamping down on the words... because nothing hurled Sebastian Moran into a state of recalcitrance as unfailingly as a reference to papa, daddy, babbo, father – regardless of fucking language.
It automatically drove him to fight against the restraints... pressing his head back against the bench, hissing a curse. Which was drowned out by the ominously swelling musical backdrop, and considering what he said, that was a very good thing.

~

Jim grinned with wild delight to see the effect he’d had on his soldier.

Then he put his hand to his ear. “I’m so sorry, darling... I didn’t hear you over this soothing music. Do you care to repeat that for me? No?”

He rose and stared down at Sebastian.

*obumbrata*

*e t velata*

*michi quoque niteris;*

*nunc per ludum*

*dorsum nudum*

*fero tui sceleris.*

*shadowed*

*and veiled*

*you plague me too;*

*now through trickery,*

*I bring my bare back*

*to your villainy.*

“Is this a daddy thing? Believe me when I say I understand all too well...” Jim rolled his eyes and shrugged.

“Well, everyone has their issues... everyone has their bloody Achilles heel. Then there are we lucky few who have triggers that will leave us broken and shaking on the floor at times, despite our best intentions... I understand, Sebastian. But you’re no use to me if you get all worked into a lather at the mere thought of him... *that* ridiculous man?”
He leaned over Sebastian, his hands resting on the bench, on either side of his head.

“Listen to me - your father is an insufferable twat. And he’s not worth an inch of your psyche. Because he’s beneath you... and not a bit of you belongs to him.”

Jim rose again and stared down at him for a long moment.

_ Hac in hora _
_ sine mora _
_ corde pulsum tangite; _
_ quod per sortem _
_ sternit fortem _

_ So at this hour _
_ without delay _
_ pluck the vibrating string; _
_ since Fate _
_ strikes down the strong man _

“You’re already your own man. But I’m talking about something else... something so much bigger and better, my Tiger...that most of the ordinary little humans out there couldn’t even begin to comprehend..."

His eyes flashed, and he crossed his arms.

"Do you think I would do this with just anyone?” he growled. Then he slammed his hands down on the bench on either side of his head.

“Now tell me... do you want me to continue? Then I’ll need those two words again... and as often as I need to hear them, you will give them to me. Do you understand, Sebastian? Do you _want more from me?” _

His breath hitched in his throat. He didn't mean to say those last two words... he _didn’t... he shouldn’t have..._ but it was too late to take them back, so he gave Sebastian a feral smile as Grieg's _In the Hall of the Mountain King_ began to play quietly.
Sebastian felt caught, off guard, defenseless, by the physical position he was in. Usually he was quite good at keeping the old tyrant locked away, and maybe... maybe the young tyrant had done this on purpose - just poke a bit, see what happens. Sebastian bared his teeth, ready to lash out, venomously, claiming that his father didn't hold any sway over him anymore, but it dawned on him that this might just prove the opposite. He huffed through his nose, then just took a deep breath, and let it out again. It was slightly shaky, but the tension in his body gradually eased. He looked up at Jim, who leaned over him, and seemed to know quite a lot about the old Moran.

As about... such things in general...

Only later Sebastian realised that although once before he had sensed things beneath the surface, that Jim Moriarty would never ever allow anybody to see, that Jim had actually put them into words now - the damage, hurt, demons of the past -

Denying them any power... and it was... strangely calming. It helped to remind Sebastian, that not a bit of him belonged to the old monster any more.

As said by the man who by now rather large pieces of Sebastian Moran belonged to. And, Sebastian didn't mind in the least –

Yes, he'd been very much his own man for quite a while now, and yet looking up at Jim, he saw something that would be... more than that -

his.

That realisation, the music, full of restrained power, coiling quietly, waiting to be unleashed again... Jim's close proximity, his eyes - Sebastian's mind tripped and somersaulted again, but at the centre of the turmoil, there was, once again, perfect calm.

“Yes.”

This.

More than he'd ever wanted anything in his life.

And he didn't even mean the phenomenal blowjob (well... that too!), because that was not what they were talking about anymore, was it?

'Do you want more from me?'

Whatever Jim wanted to give. Or take.

“Please, Sir.”

It didn't feel like begging. Yes, it was a plea.

Desire.

Acquiescence.

Surrender...

All of this. Maybe there wasn't even a word for it - but it was more than just the sum of these things.

~

Jim was staring down at Sebastian, his hands on either side of his head when his soldier finally spoke.

Oh...

The game had changed... viper-fast, and to insanely melodramatic opera music... and Jim had not seen it coming.

How could he have?

He listened to the new song playing, strings being plucked impishly.

They stared at each other, gleaming black eyes gazing into sky-blue ones... and Jim found himself leaning down and kissing him...

A kiss not of domination but acceptance of Sebastian’s surrender.

The kiss between them grew heated quickly, and Jim found himself sitting astride Sebastian, grinding down against his erection.

Dimly Jim became aware of the music growing more dramatic, and he pulled away from the kiss, and sank down to the floor between Sebastian’s legs.

Jim took his soldier’s cock in his hand and looked at him long and hard. He thought it would have been a longer game, with more mindfucking, more cuts of the knife... but strangely enough, he wasn’t in the mood anymore. Now all he cared about taking pleasure in the beautiful man at his mercy...

That, and making him have an epic meltdown... he thought, and smiled with delight.

Jim’s tongue flicked out over his lips, before he slid his mouth over Sebastian’s cock.
His fingers moved lightly over the skin of his thighs, and then grasped the well-defined muscles.

His tongue moved up and down on the beautiful cock, as he sucked firmly.

He let out a growl of pleasure in his throat, and Sebastian groaned loudly in response.

He found himself increasing the pace, and one hand gently stroked Sebastian’s balls, which made him jerk against Jim, moaning.

Oh fuck… he thought. The meltdown was supposed to be Sebastian’s, but he could feel it lapping away at his own sense of control, his own indomitable will. And over the frenetic music, he could hear the echo of Sebastian’s words...

Always.

Anything.

~

Something tilted and shifted again, their gaze locked, as if they really saw each other for the first time. The following kiss was slow and intimate. A bit dazed.

Suddenly the moment was not about struggle anymore, not about domination or a plea to be wrenched from Sebastian as condition for reward, but as though in a trance and yet with great clarity, he had given… so much more than that. Something he never knew existed, and not even Jim had dreamed of asking for.

Always.

Anything.

Carte blanche.

A gift, accepted. And yet another, deeper layer of truth, uncovered and poured into the very foundations of whatever this was becoming.

Then they tumbled back into the blaze of sheer physical sensation. Everything Jim did to him flowed through Sebastian like liquid fire, had him gasping for air, left him so sensitive to every touch that even a light one made him groan or twitch. With the residues of pain from everything that had happened since last night still present, this time Jim added pure pleasure into the addictive mix. But the headiest ingredient was to see and feel how much Jim was getting carried away, too. Sebastian gave a helpless sound of warning, his mind blindly fumbling for The Rules, and The Words...

“God… fuck … please…” He had a very blurry idea that these weren’t quite the right words, nor in
the right order. But he felt his balls draw up and when Jim's fingers brushed against them, his hips jerked upwards, his muscles shivering under his hands which were holding him down, keeping him still, while Jim's tongue did a devastatingly delicious swipe along his cock. Sebastian was hanging on by a tiny thread, fraying at lightning speed...

~

Jim listened in a daze as Sebastian gasped and groaned under his attention. The music had changed to Beethoven's Allegretto from Symphony No. 7 in A Major... a last second substitution for Ode to Joy which, Jim had thought, would be a very amusing soundtrack to make Sebastian have a mighty orgasm to. What ever had possessed him to choose this soulful, brooding piece instead?

Anyway, there was no time for reflection... Sebastian was close if the twitching and shivering and involuntary jerking were anything to go by. Then there was the murmured "God... fuck … please...“ which was unbelievably hot and... sweet? Jim's eyes flew open and he looked at Sebastian straining and moaning helplessly.

Jim stopped only to say." Come for me, Tiger..." in a husky voice before flicking the head of his cock with is tongue, then swirling over the length of his shaft... and sucking him with renewed intensity.

Sebastian's cries punctuated the music so beautifully, Jim found himself strangely moved. Then - there came a violent jerking against him, muscles tensing and shaking, Sebastian shouting loudly and gasping for breath, and there was a sharp tang against his tongue. He swallowed it down, feeling pleased. Mmm. So that's how Tiger tastes, he thought and rested his cheek momentarily against Sebastian's thigh.

Jim gazed at him, then stood up. The music still playing, he sent to Sebastian's side. He stared down at him for a long moment, and then undid his restraints. As Sebastian sat up and rubbed his wrists, Jim tilted his head and observed him.

"It's been a day. I'll order in for dinner."

Then he turned and walked out. "I assume with your appetite you'll be satisfied with anything. No objections to Thai food?" He called back, not waiting for an answer.

Then he went down the stairs, and once again was working away on his laptop when Sebastian appeared in the living room. “I'm doing some work,” he said absently. "I don't have any more Ruby Goldberg machines for you to play with or dismantle, but I'm sure you can entertain yourself?"
‘Do you think I would do this with just anyone?’

Well, if not, it must be impeccable research and observation, or pure genius, because everything Jim did felt absolutely … fucking divine. Part of Sebastian was simply shaking from bracing himself, desperately, for another round of teasing and edging, when Jim's mouth left his cock. But it did so only briefly, just long enough to utter a few words, soft, compelling, commanding, his voice like a velvet glove brushing against the hair trigger of Sebastian's self-control, and it sent him reeling... his own hoarse voice in his ears, he came, thrusting, jerking against Jim, who drew him, pushed him, released him into the surging wave of mindless pleasure...

Sebastian serenely sank back into that place where everything slowed down: heartbeat, breathing, thoughts... With eyes closed he became aware of Jim's face against his thigh, warm breath on his skin, and the slight tickle of a strand of hair... Then this disappeared too, as did the hold of the restraints. When Sebastian finally managed to halfway open his eyes, he saw Jim watching him with a slight tilt of the head – observing, cataloguing information...

Sebastian sat up. ‘Jesus.’ His voice still a bit rough, he cleared his throat and, with a half smile gingerly stretched his arms and shoulders. And only when Jim was already leaving the room did the implication of what he'd just said really sink in.

Dinner. He... wasn't expected to leave any more. Not immediately anyway.

And for the transgression to be forgiven - at least temporarily – the penance had been... this?

“Hm… no hardship,” he murmured and his smile became a grin as he rubbed his hands over his face. “And yes, Thai is fine.”

Other sensations started to creep in again - the soreness of his back, his wrists - but for the moment he felt more of a pleasant ache than anything really painful.

He got up. Still feeling a bit hazy, he needed a moment to remember – ah yes. Library. After retrieving his underwear, he found Jim already typing away on his laptop again in the living room.

And while Sebastian had no problem at all with entertaining himself, the thought struck him, that having a guest in the house probably was an entirely alien situation for Jim.

*He* had been the first to sleep in his bed. Cooking breakfast in that virgin kitchen. The first guest to ever peruse the books on his coffee table or have a nap on the sofa in the library... The notion elicited a totally inappropriate amount of buzzing pleasure in Sebastian, but also the somewhat shocking realisation that Jim probably had not the slightest fucking idea *what to do* with company. Apart from, and in between the essential activities of *eat, sleep, fuck*.

Jim finally looked up again questioningly and Sebastian realised he'd been leaning in the doorway for quite a while, just looking at him.
"Oh, I'll find something to occupy myself with, no worries..."

Feeling emboldened by Jim's mention of the Ruby Goldberg machine, he found himself saying, "I could – reset the one you have?" Well, he could try at least! He was intrigued by the toy as other people might have been by electronic gadgets.

"If you'd consider letting me go in there again of course..." Needless to say, he would not go snooping around.

"I'm good with my hands," he added with the tiniest smirk.

~

Jim gave a perplexed smile to his computer screen.

"Tigers are audacious, I'll give you that..." he said, and tapped some keys emphatically.

For a moment it was the only sound in the room.

Jim's eyes stayed on the screen.

"Are you in such a hurry to return to the scene of the crime?" he asked. "When you were just granted reprieve? All right, then! Touch nothing else. And I'm not sure what you plan to do about the poor monarch? Lost her head, and there wasn't even a revolution... You know once heads fall off, they tend to stay off..."

His eyes gleamed briefly, and he looked Sebastian, then flapped a hand at him. "Do as you will. There are materials in the drawer of the kitchen island you may find useful... though you won't find all the Queen's horses and all the Queen's men. You'll have to be resourceful to put Dizzy Lizzy back together again..."

There was a flash of a grin from Sebastian, and then he was gone - first to the kitchen to paw through supplies, and then down the hallway.

Jim shook his head. No one in the history of his time on this godforsaken earth had gotten away with the things Sebastian had... snarkiness, mouthiness, outright disobedience... and now the cheek of asking if he could return to the off-limits study!

Then there was the little incident of having manhandled Jim onto the floor. With a knee in his back. Suddenly his mind churned at the thought... how had he gone so lightly on Sebastian?? Not only he didn't kick him out as intended, but he'd given him an epic blow job! And ordered him Thai food! What the *fuck*, Jim??
(Well, his little voice interrupted, Sebastian's body is covered in whip marks, cuts, bruises, and a rather significant but elegant scar on his back, is it not?)

*Neither here nor there*, Jim replied loftily. *He LAY HANDS on me...*

*(Yess... and I want some more of *that*, please...)*

*I'm the one on top, so any laying of hands is for ME to do...* he snapped.

*(You're lying to yourself if you think you wouldn't enjoy being overpowered by him... your big, strong soldier, the voice said slyly.)*

*This conversation is over...* Jim said coldly, and returned to his work.

There was only a moment uninterrupted before the little voice returned, and Jim covered his face with his hands gave a strangled yell.

*(You could *tell* him to overpower you... then he'd be following your orders...)*

*That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard*, Jim growled back.

*(No... denying yourself what you want from the beautiful man who's surrendered to you completely... *that* would be the stupidest thing. So give me what I want... or I shall be very cross with you, darling...)*

Jim's hands remained covering his face. "Fuuuuck me," he groaned aloud.

*(Exactly what I want. Yes. Give it to me.)*

*You're a damn fool*, Jim muttered. *You don't maintain control by taking the submissive position...*
(If you can't find a way to enjoy the submissive position whenever the fuck you want and remain on top, then... you don't deserve to be King of the Castle. Because the one with the crown makes the rules, isn't that so, darling?)

Jim's hands slowly lowered, and he blinked at the screen.

*Of course*...

(Then give me what I'm asking for, precious... the voice sang. And I won't have to cause any mischief...)

*Like that would ever stop you*... Jim sighed.

(Ohhh, you'd be so *bored* without our little games... Now. Be a dear and remember what I said...)

*You think I could forget??* Jim stormed to the liquor cabinet, and pulled out a nice Riesling. He made a beeline for the kitchen and took out one wine glass. Then he stared at the glass in his hand, and pulled out a second. He put them both on the counter with a loud *clink* and began to pour.

~

The strangled yell from the living room had Sebastian in bodyguard mode, on his feet and half-way down the hall, before he checked himself...

Jesus you *Moron*, he chided himself, how the fuck should there be any danger to Jim here, in his inner sanctuary?

Well, still... while he was here, he may as well have a look. Briefly peering in, he saw nothing but Jim on the sofa with his frigging laptop. Cursing softly, and sounding so genuinely upset, that Sebastian was about to ask… But then – that would be terribly presumptuous, wouldn't it? Whatever had vexed Jim – a problem with one of his greater schemes or just a glitch in the online order process of Patara Fine Thai – it certainly wouldn't be anything Sebastian could help fix, or even was meant to be privy to. He made a silent retreat to the study, rolling his eyes at himself – when he’d rushed out, he had let go of a tiny leaf spring, before figuring out a way to save all the steps of the machine he’d already reset.
He started over again, and finally finished his efforts by putting back the little marble ball into its starting position. Then he tipped it over, setting off a trial run... Which he had to do twice, making adjustments, until everything whirred and clicked, burned and shifted as desired. Only then put he back the re-capitated monarch in her rightful place beneath the miniature guillotine.

As it turned out she had healed quite nicely. Although the method of treatment would very likely have serious limitations in a real revolution, here and now a mere touch of superglue and a bit of rest had done the trick.

He found Jim not in the living room, but in the kitchen - still gloriously half naked, and with two glasses of wine on the counter.

“All set up again, and ready to roll,” Sebastian reported with a smile, putting his working materials away into the drawer where he’d found them. Of course, there wasn’t a way to check if everything would really work as intended, not without ruining all his work. If it would not... well, he was sure Jim would find a way to make heads roll nonetheless.

At this moment the intercom was buzzing.

~

When Sebastian returned to the kitchen, Jim felt almost taken aback. Of course he knew he was in the apartment (considering how much time he’d spent thinking about that very fact) ... but then, he wasn’t used to people disappearing (into his study!!) and then suddenly reappearing in the kitchen. The man moved silently as a ninja... an excellent quality in an assassin, but disconcerting in a houseguest. Jim was most certainly not used to being disconcerted at home... (and in his experience, when people disappeared it was for good).

He barely managed to not yell in shock, but he did flinch which was quickly covered up - by bumping into the counter to move around Sebastian, sauntering to the island to replace supplies.

Bloody fucking Tigers, making themselves right at home, he thought in annoyance with a thrill of illicit pleasure underneath. Next he’d probably be cheerfully asking how to get his own keycard.

Jim's mind went momentarily blank at this, and then he replied, "How fortunate you came along when you did, Sebastian! The machine might have remained untested, and not in need of repair.”

Sebastian's inevitable snarky retort was interrupted by the intercom buzzing.

"Answer Intercom," Jim ordered, and then crisply said, "Yes."
"Delivery is on its way up, Mr Blaidd," the security officer said.

"Good. Terminate call," Jim responded.

He picked up the wine glasses and headed to the living room.

"That's your cue," he called back. "Answer the door. Payment's been dealt with."

He pictured the look on the concierge's face when a half-naked Tiger appeared at the door - wearing only underwear and covered in lash marks and cuts. He grinned madly. And so, the Moriarty mystique continued, though by an entirely different name.

By the time Sebastian appeared carrying bulging sacks of Thai takeaway containers, Jim was lounging on the sofa, drinking wine as he looked at his laptop.

"Well, look at that... Steve made the changes to your schedule as ordered, but you're still on assignment elsewhere tomorrow. Then back on bodyguard detail the next day. So you'll have to do without my sweet face for a day, I'm afraid... The world is determined to keep us apart, Romeo!" he said with melodramatic flair. "Have some Riesling... it will soften the blow. But first bring me a spring roll. Then have more wine. The Tango Mango chicken, and the coconut rice are mine... you can devour anything else you want... I think I ordered enough for a Tiger, but I may have underestimated..." He looked on innocently as Sebastian took container after container out of the bags in shock, and piled them on the coffee table.

~

At first it had felt a bit alien, even awkward – traipsing around a flat that wasn't his own, with barely a stitch of clothing on him. Sometimes he felt Jim's gaze on him, so intent it made his skin prickle; at other times he was completely left to his own devices and free to explore (not totally, but he enjoyed testing the boundaries). And gradually he got used to it, becoming quite at ease.

What was still vexing and took some more getting used to, was Jim operating the gadgets and features of said flat by voice command. Sebastian had to check himself more than once, when he snapped to attention, trying to figure out what it was he was supposed to do.

“Christ, aren't you afraid of any misunderstandings?” he muttered under his breath at some point.
“Like … ordering twenty opera tickets by mistake or… a year's supply of toilet paper?”

Well, something like that seemed to have happened, when Sebastian dutifully went to the door to get the delivery. He stared at the multitude of carrier bags in the hands of the concierge in nearly as much shock as the man was looking at him. The eyes of the cultivated elderly gentleman, traveling over bandaged wrists, cuts and bruises, made Sebastian acutely aware of what he must look like. But it was him who recovered first. With the hint of a smile he reached for the bags, catching a glimpse of the name tag.

“No worries, Simon – “ Sebastian's voice dropped to a confidential hush. “He changed his mind. Opted for Thai this time, so I'll live.”

But you probably didn't get to be a concierge in an establishment like this if you were of the meddling sort, or easily shocked (or prone to call the police over a bit of eccentric behaviour by the inhabitants), so the man just nodded, handing him the bags.

“Very good, Sir. Have a... lovely evening.”

“Thank you.” Sebastian watched him leave, then he closed the door and carried his load into the living room. Before he could say something, Jim started to bring him up to date on the revised work schedule.

“Well, I wouldn't go as far as calling Steve the world, but he's certainly trying, yes...” He put the bags down, and took a glass of wine. Then he raised the glass in Jim's direction, doing quite a good job of looking like pining, heartbroken Romeo. “I don't know how I will make it a whole day without you, Juliet – I might just have to shoot someone!”

Unloading the bags, piling tray after tray onto the coffee table, he still couldn't wrap his head around the monstrous amount of food Jim had ordered. What did he do – tick a box at the bottom of the menu saying 'one of each'?! 

“Who else did you say is coming?”

He answered Jim's musings about his appetite with a smile that did full justice to a hungry Tiger, then he went into the kitchen and came back with cutlery and several plates. He found the spring rolls, put one on a plate and handed it to Jim, then he set about getting the task organised further. Everything smelled delicious - the Mango chicken (which went to Jim), lamb curry with coconut, duck in peanut sauce, beef pad khing, crisp vegetables, deep-fried prawns... and what looked like five pounds of rice...

As recommended, he had another glass of wine – “To Tigers and those who feed them” - and after
devouring a spring roll as well, he piled duck and vegetables onto his plate...

“So what's the job tomorrow?” he asked, munching. It felt quite difficult to think of something as mundane as the return to the day job, but... he'd have to at some stage, wouldn't he? They both had to.

~

From the living room, Jim could hear Sebastian's comment to the concierge, and he couldn't help but snicker. Simon's response was, as expected, gracious and taken aback. And when Sebastian returned with the bags, he appeared to be in a very chipper mood - it was almost as if the altercation in the library had been an idle daydream... of 'the things that could go very wrong' variety. Although Jim was still having a hard time letting of the fact that Sebastian had laid hands on him...

Even though he'd allowed him to stay...

and was now feeling relaxed and enjoying the meal...

and was already looking forward to more bed-related activities...

where was he going with this?

....

Oh yes... being knocked onto the fucking floor.

Sebastian still had to answer for that - Jim just had to figure out when - and how...

operatic blow jobs were fun, but hardly a suitable punishment...

Momentarily he was distracted by Sebastian making a quip, and calling him Juliet.

Good god... he was actively flirting with him, not toning it down at all.

His Tiger then took charge of the meal. He had a knack for it, Jim thought - taking over in the house, making himself at home...

Hmm.

He accepted his spring roll and mango chicken dish - eating the latter delicately with his chopsticks, and dipping the former into tangy sauce before popping it into his mouth with a soft moan of pleasure.
"The job tomorrow? Do you mean to say you haven't checked in for orders from your employer?" Jim asked, shaking his head. "Nothing too strenuous. There's a land developer who'll be arriving at a business meeting at a posh hotel... as long as he doesn't make it to his meeting, it's your call how you do it. His home location and schedule for the day are all available to you. Have fun with it, Tiger..."

~

Sebastian watched Jim tuck into his Mango chicken with relish, and smiled. He gestured at the array of different dishes covering the table.

"Please feel free to have a go at... whatever, right?"

(And wasn't it very magnanimous of him to allow Jim to eat whatever he fancied, of the food he ordered and paid for himself?)

At the moment it felt as though all his transgressions and Jim's vexation about it had blown over nicely, yet Sebastian had an inkling he'd be kidding himself if he believed that. The thought elicited a prickling thrill down his spine.

"I don't think I'll be able to eat half of it..." Not if he didn't want to pass out like a python after swallowing an ox.

Good thing tomorrow’s assignment sounded like a leisurely hunt.

~

"You can always take it with you tomorrow when you go home," Jim said, not thinking. Their eyes met briefly, and then he popped the last bite of spring roll into his mouth. "I certainly can't eat all this," he said, airily.

Sebastian nodded, thoughtfully.

Jim tried to ignore the strange feeling in his stomach, a clenching sensation that he was not very happy with. He almost found himself wishing it was a sign of food poisoning - that would be preferable to having a feeling arise at the thought of Sebastian leaving for his rightful home. Jim finished chewing his spring roll and swallowed hard. Then he slipped to the floor and crawled
around the table until he found the house Pad Thai with tamarind sauce, and the avocado-yam salad rolls. He plunked some on his plate, and looked at Sebastian sitting on the floor and sampling other dishes. Carrying his own plate, Jim moved towards him, managing to look like he was on the prowl.

"Here, Tiger. You must try these," he said offhandedly. He held up a bite of Pad Thai with black lacquered chopsticks.

Sebastian moved in quickly to snap up the bite, and Jim whispered, "Slowly, darling... you'll get sauce all over the floor, you beast..." then pushed the morsel of food into his mouth in a rather sensual manner. Jim watched, feeling pleased when Sebastian made appreciative moaning noises as he chewed.

"You won't find another Pad Thai like that in London..." he said confidently. "Or even outside of Bangkok. The owner comes from a long line of chefs in Thailand, and this is a family recipe... Now... try this..."

He held up a salad roll, and Sebastian opened his mouth, grinning. Once again, Jim pushed it slowly in... as Sebastian chewed, his eyes lit up. Jim smiled with satisfaction, and placed a salad roll on his own tongue, before chewing it - delighting in the contrast of soft rice paper and avocado, with crunchy deep fried yams. Watching Sebastian heap more food onto his plate before shoving an entire spring roll into his mouth, Jim didn't bother returning to the sofa, and settled next to him on the floor.

"So we're eating like barbarians tonight..." he said, raising an eyebrow. "What are you planning for dessert - eating straight out of the ice cream carton?"

~

'...tomorrow when you go home.'

Yes, there was... that.

But - from expecting to be sent on his merry way right after the Friday-night-journey into the deep dark woods, to still being here on Saturday evening, with both of them lounging about half-naked on the floor, indulging in a hedonistic amount of sensational Thai food ... they'd come quite a long way, hadn't they?

Jim offering him a bite of something Sebastian hadn't tried yet, whispering words that snaked around him like tendrils of temptation... warning... (affection?) ... It felt like it was about food as much (or as little) as last night had been purely about sex.

And the way Sebastian tilted his head, slowly running his tongue around the tip of the chopsticks and then underneath the dripping food was anything but merely preventing sauce all over the floor...

Uhm... where were they? Yes, the Pad Thai. It was heavenly...
Sebastian's eyes closed while he savoured it. “Well, I have it on good authority that the owner of this place is very well connected with the carpet industry,” he murmured, with a tiny smirk. Then he swallowed and took a sip of wine.

"And with the Asian Cuisine Empire of this city as well? How do you know all this?” He was silenced by the next offering from the chopsticks – different, surprising, and just as delicious. “God, this is good,” he groaned, looking at Jim through half closed eyes.

An epiphany, really.

“Like Barbarians? Very much in keeping then with the whole weekend, don't you think?” He smiled, devouring another spring roll and then continued to try... everything, pondering the desert suggestion. “Oh, we've had ice cream already... But I think I saw something good... “

After refilling their wine glasses, he hoisted himself to his feet and ambled into the kitchen, from where he returned with a strawberry trifle and two spoons.

~

The quip about the carpet had Jim rolling his eyes mightily.

"My God, Sebastian... did you have any idea that you were courting death in that moment? How fortunate I decided to be merciful, darling...” He popped another bite of Pad Thai into his mouth.

"The owner of the restaurant was a client, actually... there was a gangster making things difficult for his establishment... I helped him take care of his little problem, and business has been booming ever since.”

He observed his soldier continue to sample from all the containers. Watching Sebastian enjoy food was surprisingly satisfying and... stimulating. How did that make any sense? Why should someone's hearty appetite have an effect on him?

He watched Sebastian get up and saunter to the kitchen. It was bizarre to think he's only just arrived last night... and in that time, he had received an invitation into Jim's bedroom (a first), knew all the contents of the refrigerator, had a nap in the library... and managed to get in and out of the study without serious consequence.

Jim shook his head in amazement, and drank some more wine.

When Sebastian returned, he was holding what looked like a trifle... Mmm. Strawberries?

"There was a trifle in there?” he asked in surprise. "How do you know these things?"
He patted the spot on the floor next to him.

"Sit your arse down."

Jim drained his glass of wine, and looked up with gleaming eyes.

~

Sebastian smiled and picked a sliver of spicy meat out of a dish and put it into his mouth.

“Hm, to be honest – “ he said, chewing, as he thought about that day when the hood had been pulled off his head and he’d realised just who was circling around him, “... it was at least half the thrill that I didn’t know what I was courting...” Or whom. “Just that I did...”

Courting something, someone... who he felt would have an impact on his life as no one ever had before. Maybe even ending it. Yes, that too could have been in the cards, he knew that.

And it had made him feel alive as not much else had, in a very long time.

“I was also fairly pissed off, I admit.” And he was an arrogant sod and figured that if the terrifying, mighty presence in the shadows really wanted to annihilate him, it would have done so with no more thought about it than swatting a fly. He was after all the all-powerful mastermind who ran this city, head of a criminal empire of unfathomable reach...

Sebastian listened to the tale of the chef in distress, continuing to root around for more of the delicious pieces of beef.

“See – “ he looked up with a big smile, “…who wouldn't want to be part of such a noble organisation, helping those in need, the oppressed and the downtrodden...”

Which of course was the last thing this organisation was about. In the end everything, always, somehow served Jim's interests – including keeping the best Thai cook east of Bangkok in business because he was a sucker for his Pad Thai.

When he presented the oh so promising looking dessert, it was much to Jim's puzzled but pleasant surprise. Sebastian's eyes sparkled with amusement at the question. How he'd known? Had Jim forgotten he'd tasked him with preparing breakfast? The impromptu lunch he'd whipped up? BY now he knew his way around the Chez Moriarty kitchen pretty well.

“Asks the man who knows everything,” he commented with a smirk, “apart from trifling matters like the contents of his own fridge.” Fully aware he might just be skating on thin ice again with his teasing, he complied in a timely manner, sitting down beside Jim whose shining eyes looked like a
kid’s on Christmas morning. Sebastian removed the lid and placed the bowl in front of them.

“I don’t know if eating this is possible without *getting cream all over the carpet,*” he purred.

~

Jim eyed both man and dessert as they approached him. Both looked delectable.

“I have every confidence that you will keep cream off the carpet,” Jim said in a silky tone. “The CEO of Yazco Carpets can be a *fucking* tyrant about these things.... I promise you, you don’t want to see him fly into a rage about stains...”

Sebastian rolled his eyes slightly as he sat down, grinning. “No stains. Yes. Sir...”

Jim shook his head sadly. “I hear ‘Yes, Sir’, but what I see is a snarky Tiger... one of these things isn’t sincere... “

Sebastian spooned some trifle up, and held it out to Jim.

“And strawberry trifle isn’t going to make me forget it,” Jim warned, snatching up the spoon. He sniffed it, and then slid it into his mouth. “Mmm... but it will make me postpone thinking about it...”

He took another spoonful, and languorously licked the layers of cream, cake, custard, and bright red strawberries. His eyelids fluttered shut and he chewed slowly.

“Well, I’m glad you found this, it’s... quite good....”

His spoon continued to dip into the trifle, and come away with heaping, heavenly mounds of deliciousness... Sebastian’s spoon was doing the same, and sometimes bumping into his with a clang... and one time, even stealing cream from Jim’s spoon.

Jim’s mouth fell open. The *cheek* of him... He looked from his spoon to Sebastian’s innocent expression as he ate his spoonful with a flourish. Jim slowly dipped a couple of fingers into the trifle and dragged them across Sebastian’s face.

“Oh, I’m so sorry... I thought you wanted some more?” Jim said, batting his eyelashes. He slid another big spoonful into his mouth.

Don’t look at him, he ordered himself as he chewed. This is going to escalate, and be a ridiculous bloody mess, *do not look at him*...
His eyes caught Sebastian’s, and Jim stared at him in open challenge. He looked at the cream still on Sebastian’s cheeks and nose, and smiled fiercely.

~

'It can't be perfunctory, and it certainly can't be sarcastic... sorry, darling. You have to mean it.... believe me, Sebastian - I will know if you don't…’

Sebastian remembered the words with a small smile. He believed it, because Jim could read him like an open book – had from the very beginning – he probably could with his fucking eyes closed. The innocent face Sebastian put on as well as the placating gesture of handing Jim a perfect spoonful of perfect trifle would only postpone the consequences.

Briefly closing his eyes Sebastian savoured the thought, and the first taste of the trifle with equal pleasure.

His spoon bumped into Jim's repeatedly, as they dug in – because you didn't have to be uncannily perceptive to notice that Jim definitely tried to scoop up more of the strawberries and the cream. The cover-up of leaving part of the spongy cake behind did not work! So Sebastian nicked part of the cream back from Jim's spoon, before it could even leave the bowl. Jim's incredulous look had him smirking and also feeling a tingle of exhilaration.

That would not go unanswered, and ohh... Jim's fingers dipping into the cream and drawing three streaks across his face was the sweetest declaration of war he'd ever received!

As innocent as Jim's question was, the stare and the smile that accompanied it were a feral challenge. Sebastian answered with the same.

“Yes... not nearly enough,” he breathed, moving in from the side and swiftly, intercepting Jim's heaped spoon with his mouth. “You're cheating...” he mumbled and sat back, chewing, swallowing, grinning. The dash of cream which had transferred from his face to Jim's shoulder and chin totally (not) by accident, looked very fetching. “... Snow White.”

God, he would so pay for this, so why not make it worthwhile? Using the element of surprise, his spoon dove back into the trifle again, and came away with a substantial loot of strawberries.

~

*Look what you started*, Jim growled at himself.
He stared at Sebastian who was chewing away, and grinning like a lunatic. Jim looked down at his
cream-coated shoulder, and his eyes narrowed.

(Mmm... what's better than strawberries and cream?... Sebastian with strawberries and cream...) his
voice purred.

*What do you think is going to happen if we start acting like children?* Jim demanded of himself.

(More fun than you've ever had, sweetheart... and very adult fun at that...)

Jim's eyes widened.

"Snow White, again... that makes you Prince Charming, does it?" Jim rolled his eyes. "Well, *this*
Snow White would have far more in common with the Wicked Queen than the original..."

Jim moved quickly, scooping up some of the remaining cream, and slapping Sebastian across the
face with it.

"Brute," he said, eyes flashing.

(That's it, honey... you play with your pretty soldier...)

Jim giggled at the look of shock on Sebastian's cream-covered face. Then he launched himself at him
and licked off a stripe of cream from his cheek.

He looked down and realised he was now sitting in Sebastian's lap, with his hands gripping his
shoulders.

He swiped some more cream from his cheek, and held out a finger enticingly towards his mouth.

"How can it be cheating, honey... when I'm the one who makes the rules?" Jim asked innocently.

His voice dropped to a low growl. "And I say... *game on*, Tiger."

~

“*Of course* I'm Prince Charming, ask around,” Sebastian grinned, unerringly poking what had
already proved to be an enticingly raw spot of Jim's. “Going to kill me with a poison apple? But where would be the fun in...” He laughed and flinched, but not quite quick enough to escape the retaliation, ending up with another hefty slab of cream on his face. And a huge grin as well, at the alluring (and a bit surreal) turn of events. When Jim flew at him, he didn't make any attempt to dodge the assault, which turned out to be a sensuous, hungry lick from jaw to cheek. Grabbing Jim around the waist he gave a soft, appreciative growl, pressing his hips upwards against the delicious weight, taking full advantage of Jim being suddenly, conveniently in his lap.

“Brute?” His voice was a harsh whisper, close to Jim's ear, “Yes – I've been called that, too…”

And how could it be that Jim being suddenly so close again, was as intoxicating and arousing as if the last time had been a week, and not an hour ago? Sebastian's tongue licked the cream off Jim’s finger as a dedicated homage to what had happened said hour ago.

“So sorry, my fault” – he murmured, forgetting about the rule that the rules were Jim's alone. Sebastian’s tone was laced with soft sarcasm. Game on? Not bothering to ask about the rules for that game, Sebastian closed his teeth around the proffered finger, leaving Jim momentarily with the use of just one hand, while Sebastian adjusted his grip and shifted position. The next instance they rolled over the carpet (whose fate was apparently already sealed), and guess who came out on top? The brute.

His legs between Jim's, and holding one of his wrists down, he diligently set about cleaning the cream off of Jim's shoulder, good Tiger that he was. Not his fault he still had cream on his face, was it? - and thus the process more than replaced whatever his mouth removed, especially when the licks and small bites trailed along Jim's collarbone down to his chest...

~

Jim's words seemed to have a wildfire effect on Sebastian... as if kindling had been heating up in the sun, and then a match was lit.

Fwoosh...

It was amazing to experience - Jim had never allowed anything like this in his adult life. Well, not since moving to London, anyway... he shoved aside thoughts of Dublin and the past, and focused on Sebastian - his tongue dragging along Jim's finger in the most erotic way imaginable... and then his teeth. When he rolled Jim underneath him, his breathing quickened.

Fuck, he thought... Now what??
(We let him...) the voice sighed dreamily.

Jim's eyes closed as he felt Sebastian's muscular legs between his.
Felt his wrist being held down against the carpet.
Felt Sebastian's lips and tongue licking up cream from his body, and replacing it with more cream, and bites besides.

"Mmm," Jim heard himself say, in a lazy purring voice. "Tiger... you really are the most unruly beast! You realise you're making more of a mess, don't you? What do you intend to do about that?" he breathed, realising that his eyes had closed, his hands were moving up his muscular back, and he was rocking his pelvis against Sebastian's insistently.

*Really... we're not even going to play a LITTLE hard to get?* he demanded.

(Shut the fuck up, Jimmy) his little voice whispered. *(I'm in charge now...)*

~

Suddenly it didn't feel like a power-struggle, but rather like going after the same thing, together. Something tried to warn Sebastian to be on his guard, but for the moment there wasn't the slightest hint of objection from Jim, or displeasure at him taking charge, just Jim's hands on his back and his hips rocking upwards shamelessly...

*’But you'd like to, wouldn't you...’*

The memory of those whispered words a lure, so totally irresistible the mere *possibility* took Sebastian's breath away...

*’You've already imagined what it would be like to take me...’*

Sebastian moaned, his groin pressing back against Jim's with slow, suggestive movements. He didn’t raise his head from the delicious smell and taste of smooth, heated skin, so exquisitely sweet and sticky (even more so in all places he had already taken care of).

And *God*, when Jim *purred*, Sebastian could *feel* in all the right places and it was even sweeter than cream and strawberries.
What did he intend to do … “’bout what? ... being unruly...?” he murmured while his lips, and his teeth found Jim's right nipple - for a brief sharp instance, then he pressed his tongue against the very same spot soothingly, before sliding further down “...or about the mess?” Because seriously, how much messier could it get than rutting against each other on the carpet like teenagers, with the remnants of a sticky dessert between them? “...’s hopeless,” he concluded, “either way...” By now he was nuzzling the waistband of Jim's boxers, then running his fingers under it – because even just two sets of underwear between them seemed like an appalling amount of clothing.

~

Jim let out a slow exhale as he felt Sebastian's groin press against his... Sebastian moaned, and Jim made a rumbling purring noise in response. Sebastian then shivered. Oh... things were definitely heating up. And Jim would have to keep a close eye on the proceedings before they got to the point of no return...

But it was remarkably hard to keep his head as he listened to Sebastian's seductively soft voice, and felt his lips, his teeth, his tongue... Jim groaned a reply, before managing to mutter, "fucking hopeless..." but as to what he was referring, he didn't even know anymore.

His mind scrambled for purchase. What was happening? He did not lose control of his thoughts like this. He did not speak without choosing his words carefully and concisely... only when he was flying into a rage did words come careening out. But this was very different than a rage. It was like slipping sideways, feeling your car drift across lanes of traffic... only to slide down the seat and let go of the wheel completely.

What the fuck, Jim!! If you're not driving, who is??

(Sebastian has it... such big strong hands...)

No one drives but me... he protested weakly.

(Enjoy the ride...) his little voice giggled.

He felt a strange sense of euphoria fill him, as Sebastian's fingers slipped underneath the waistband of his pants. And peel them down.

His breathing quickened and he did the same - soon they were both wriggling out of their boxer briefs, and throwing them aside. Now they were naked on the carpet, their chests and faces dotted with smears of white cream.
Jim's gaze never straying from Sebastian's, he reached up to the table, and scooped up another handful from the trifle bowl. He smeared a zigzag of cream from Sebastian's chest down to his cock, and over his balls. Smiling fiercely, he reached up for a strawberry and ran it over the trail of cream before swirling his tongue around it luxuriously and then sliding it into his mouth. in the most suggestive manner.

~

Between the expectation to be reined back in and quite the opposite happening… between the demand to keep the cream off the carpet and a thick swath of it being gleefully slathered onto his body… Sebastian's brain lurched and then stopped being any help whatsoever. Crouching, his eyes glowing, flickering, still on Jim's, he advanced slowly. Crawling over him, effectively trapping him, without laying a hand on him. No, no cream on the carpet for the moment… it was all slowly, obscenely rubbing off on Jim – his hard cock, his abdomen, his chest, until Sebastian's hands were braced on either side of his head. With a hard and hungry kiss, he dove down on that mouth with the fierce, strawberry-red smile of a fucking vampire.

~

God... the sight of Sebastian crawling over him, with his hard body coated with cream...

Jim watched, mesmerised. Then his eyes closed as he felt it glide over him, leaving a trail of cream over his own body. This had started out a silly game, and now it had morphed into something else entirely... something that gave Sebastian's eyes a predatory gleam... and made Jim feel like a sweet little bunny being stalked.

Only - he was not a sweet bunny.

He was a creature of darkness, wrapped in a pretty package. Evidently Sebastian was quite taken with both his package and his dark side. Jim smiled smugly.

What SIDE? It's ALL darkness, he snapped at himself.

(Oh god, he's going to kiss me,) his little voice murmured.

Oh god, he's going to kiss me, Jim thought in a daze, and did not a fecking thing to stop it.
Only watched his face grow nearer, and parted his lips for him, and then they were kissing and it was hard, and it was devouring, and it was glorious...

As though Sebastian's stolen kiss from the club was picking up where they left off...

Jim slid his hands through Sebastian's hair, and grasped his head firmly.

He moaned into Sebastian's mouth, and his fingers tightened in his hair.

~

Just like last night at the club (had it only been last night?!!), there was the exhilarating thrill of transgressing. There was a mere blink of hesitation from Jim, in the face of something unexpected, and apparently completely unheard of in this part of the universe. Sebastian felt drunk with all the possibilities of what his reaction might be – anything from reciprocating to going for his throat.

Their kiss was a frenzy of heat and violence and… fucking hell... the glorious, sticky, slippery mess between them just fuelled the craving for more and the way Sebastian's body moved against Jim's was nothing less than the allusion to a mindblowing - devastatingly slow – hard - fuck.

The low moan against his lips travelled through him with the intensity of an electric current. It nearly drowned out the realisation that to attempt anything involving carpet burns and custard as lube with a psychopath (admittedly adorable but also his boss, and a fastidiously neat control freak) was maybe not the best idea.

But anything with such a warning attached, had the same effect on Sebastian Moran as a fix dangling in front of an addict. Making the most of being on top of Jim he revelled in every eager response, in the full body contact, and perversely also in the glowing heat and fierce sting he was feeling in the nicks and cuts from Jim's knife. He only stilled somewhat at the tightening grip in his hair, but the sound he made was a low growl of appreciation rather than protest.

His lips parted just a fraction from Jim's, just enough to renew an offer he'd already made last night, and the suggestive, slowly grinding movement of his hips didn't leave much room for speculation as to what he meant.

"You wouldn't even have to beg," he whispered.

~

Jim had never kissed (or been kissed, more accurately) like this in his life... and he recognised that it was a Very Bad Idea. But then he'd been warning Sebastian that this entire thing was a bad idea from the beginning. How much more threatening did he have to be?? he thought indignantly. He'd
consider this in the morning - after Sebastian left, since he didn't seem capable of rational thought around the man.

He sighed in frustration, first at his lack of control, and then at the thought of Sebastian leaving... and this just made the kissing more intense.

Fuck - the feeling of Sebastian's body sliding against his, grinding against his pelvis... Jim's eyelids fluttered shut. But then Sebastian broke off the kiss, and his eyes flew open.

At his comment, Jim felt such a strange mix of feelings, he wasn't sure what to focus on.

_Beg??_

Indignation-anger-secret thrill-lust-desire-frustration swept through him.

He was a hair away from sucking in his breath, but he managed to slow his breathing the fuck down.

He huffed out a laugh. "Really. What a generous offer..."

(God, you're going to turn it down, aren't you!) his little voice said, panicking.

"That reminds me, darling... do let me the fuck up, won't you?" he said sweetly.

Sebastian sighed and released his wrist then sat up.

Jim climbed onto him and tipped him over.

With a thump and a muffled groan from Sebastian as his back landed on the floor, Jim stared down at him hungrily.

"Still thinking of it, are you? What it would be like to take me? To slide that beautiful cock into my arse?" he murmured. Then he slid down and licked the cream from his chest down to his abdomen and ending at his cock and balls. He looked up. "Tempting," he purred.

Then he slid up Sebastian's body and stared down at him. "Very tempting. Now. _Behave_, Tiger" he said in a seductive whisper before leaning down to kiss him.

~

There was the tiniest hesitation before Sebastian moved... As if he entertained the notion, just for a brief moment, to _not_ behave. Or maybe it was just that _thing_ that happened, whenever Jim's eyes
looked directly at him, into him, and everything just stopped -

Then Sebastian let out a sigh, reluctantly complying. He had barely eased himself off and back a little, when Jim took over and reversed their positions – Sebastian rolling over and things slipping back into their natural order. Complete with an adrenaline-spiking flash of pain as his back hit the carpet, and Jim’s seductive teasing.

What? Did he still think of it??

“Fuck’s sake...” Was the sky blue? His brain virtually threatened to trip out again, at the image of Jim underneath him – panting, unravelling, his eyes closing... And every word from Jim painted it more vividly.

“What do you think?” He gave him the tiniest smirk. “And you do too.”

Obviously. Downright purring, the little bastard...

And now driving him mad with his tongue again.

Sebastian shifted up onto his elbows, partly to take some of his weight off his back, but more for a better view of what Jim was doing. He abandoned the concept a few moments later, his breaths growing quicker and harsher, when Jim leaned in for another kiss. One of his hands went down to Jim's arse, and the other grabbed the back of his neck.

~

Seb's response had crashed through Jim's mind, and continued to echo as they kissed.

And you do, too.

And you do, too.

Fuck.

(I want to-) the little voice started.

I know you do. Not today, he groaned, his mind momentarily going blank as he felt Sebastian's hand grasping his arse..

(But soooon?)
Oh god... we'll see, he replied, feeling Sebastian's other hand tightening on the back of his neck. He struggled to take back control of his mind. Restraints? Don't want to move. Find something to use as makeshift restraints? Then - won't feel these hands.

He looked down at Sebastian, whose eyes were closed. He appeared lost to the moment, to the feeling of Jim's skin...

These hands... grasping his hair, squeezing his arse.

He weakened. It felt like a thick stone wall cracking slowly - it still stayed mighty and intact, but there were pieces falling off.

His mind reeled. He broke off the kiss, and stared down at Sebastian, who looked back questioningly, his hands frozen in place.

"Go get lube..." Jim ordered. He rolled off Sebastian, and sat on the carpet. "From the nightstand... No - you brought it to the library and just left it there... didn't you."

Sebastian hauled himself up with a wince, and looked back at Jim.

"While you're up, I want you to imagine yourself fucking my arse... moving in and out... in and out..." he breathed, with half-closed eyes. "Starting slow... then getting harder... and faster... harder and faster... until you - can't - stop yourself - from -" Jim dipped a finger in the trifle bowl, and flicked some cream at Sebastian's chest, before licking the remnants from his finger lasciviously. "And that's the closest you're getting tonight. No pouting, now... go."

He grinned and licked a strawberry in a downright pornographic manner, laughing to himself as he heard a huff from Sebastian as he turned and headed for the stairs.

~

When he was ordered to get up and fetch lube it sent another thrilling flash through Sebastian which nearly had him up on his feet in a blink and off like a shot down the hallway.

... fuck's sake, Moran, contain yourself!

The part of him set on retaining some shred of dignity stared in incredulous vexation at the one that reminded him of a bloody Golden Retriever – practically tripping over his own feet in excitement when seeing master reach for the leash or a stick...

(Oh. Fucking. Hell.)
Sebastian swallowed, unable to tear his eyes away from Jim, who, topping it off with a deliciously obscene show involving a fucking strawberry trifle, and his own special brand of cruel, sensual glee, as he seared the image into Sebastian's mind of what it would be like -

and how it would feel...

Then abruptly informing him it was not going to happen!

Not tonight, anyway...

Not tonight...

certainly meaning...

*Good God*... from Sebastian's throat came a low, downright *tormented* sound, as he finally turned away. What he muttered during the short trip to the library definitely contained several colourful variations of *'insufferable'* and *'bastard'*. When he came back, he dropped to his knees beside Jim, handing him the lube, and from the state of his arousal it was obvious that – willingly or not – he had been mentally following Jim's instructions to a T.

~

The sound that came from Sebastian was *delightful*...

Jim laughed quietly to himself as Sebastian stormed off to get the lube... mumbling things that would have gotten anybody else killed. Jim grinned as he snatched up another strawberry. What was it about his soldier that broke all the rules? he mused as he sucked on the strawberry.

(Go on, then... break the rules...) hissed the voice.

*I already decided, he's not fucking me! NOT NOW*...

(But... no restraints, yessss? You want to feel those lovely, big hands... see what he does with them... )

Jim crushed the strawberry in his teeth in a burst of fleshy sweetness.

When Sebastian returned to the room, Jim was leaning against the sofa with his head against a seat cushion. He stared at him lazily for a long moment where Sebastian waited on his knees. Jim handed him back the lube slowly.
"Put it on me... and in you. You're going to ride my cock, Tiger..." 

He slid down to the floor. "And yes, this is breaking the rules. Let's just see how it goes, shall we?"

Then he snapped his fingers, and pointed to his own cock.

~

When Sebastian came back Jim sat sprawled against the sofa and just stared at him – amusement glittering in his eyes, hunger and something else he couldn't begin to place. Sitting on his haunches beside him, he was about to put forward the question (something to the effect of 'how do you want me?'), when Jim told him to …

Ooh.

Pulling the inside of his cheek between his teeth, Sebastian tried to hide his smile, but wasn't entirely successful. Yes, this was breaking the rules - and not by him, but by the man who'd made them himself. He took back the lube and squeezed some onto his hand. Letting it warm up a bit, he cocked an eyebrow in Jim's direction.

"Getting a tad lazy after a big meal, are we?"

With a grin he shuffled closer, leaning in to do as he was told.

Jim's little mindfuck had left him nearly shaking with desire for something that in the same breath had been teasingly snatched away again, out of his reach (for now, Moran, just for now). It had also left him with a ragingly hard cock. Jim's wasn't quite there yet, but it gave a delightful twitch when Sebastian's hand closed around it. He took his sweet time to reacquaint himself with it, revelling in the growing hardness when he gave it a slight squeeze, and the beautiful effect of just a few, nearly languorous strokes. His fingers started to trace every contour through the slickness and... Was he driving him crazy? Oh, he was only just following orders...

And for the salacious images Jim had so enjoyed painting, Sebastian was happy to provide a bit of colour. Never ceasing to stroke his cock, his other hand skimmed down to Jim's balls, and further down to the smooth skin behind them, and still a bit further... - the touch to the tight sweet ring of muscle light enough to be accidental. Slow and deliberate enough to be not. Then his fingers moved away again, trailing back up.

With Sebastian looking down, his eyes drinking in the sight of what he was doing, Jim couldn't see his smile... Or maybe he could, when Sebastian finally pulled away and let out a soft breath. Slightly
dizzy with the sense, the very taste of arousal and tension in the air, when he unhurriedly straddled Jim and grabbed the lube again to put a second, generous helping onto his fingers.

Well, regardless which way you bent preparing yourself, it wasn't the most elegant thing to witness, but as he knew from experience, it could still be highly arousing to watch. Also, when taking a cock up your arse more often in one day than you normally would in a year, it wasn't a bad idea to apply yourself to the task with some dedication. So, he did just that - on his knees, leaning forward, bracing his left hand against the floor to take part of his weight.

And still, he wouldn't be hurried.

Oh yes, he was still obeying orders.

Something blazed in Jim's eyes, looking up at him, and it completely shot his concentration. So at the second finger, Sebastian closed his eyes.

At the third, his head dropped forward and he had to steady his breathing.

~

From the floor, Jim watched Sebastian's face as he stroked lube onto his cock, as ordered.

God... the man could not look more pleased and smug if he tried...

Jim began to arch his eyebrow, but was too distracted by the feeling of his hand...

Oh fuck, his hand...

He felt himself harden underneath his touch, his beautiful strokes, and now his other hand was moving, moving slowly, sensuously, down to his balls, oh god, and down further along his perineum, and, oh fuck this was a bad idea...

Jim felt his breath begin to quicken, and he exhaled slowly.

Sebastian straddled him as though he had all the time in the world, and Jim watched impatiently, why was he taking so long...

And then.

The first finger went in.

And then the second...

God... he'd ordered former playthings to finger themselves before, and wank off for him as well - these had always been acts of subservience and submission that Jim enjoyed mightily. This was no submission, and it was not subservient in the slightest... Sebastian was performing for him. When he was three fingers deep, his eyes opened again, and he flung his heated gaze up at Jim - who had to stop his mouth from dropping open.

Jesus Christ...
he had thought he'd been exerting delicious control, for his own pleasure and sense of power... but now he was lying on the carpet (amidst dabs of strawberry trifle!), smeared with cream, under Sebastian's hulking frame, and he was transfixed... utterly and completely.

Get - it - back - under - your - control - Jimmy -

"Beautifully done, Tiger..." he said, managing to keep his voice steady by aiming halfway between purring and singing. "Now. Show's over. Don't keep me waiting any longer..."
Thanks For The Amazing Sex, Get Out

There were truths about Sebastian Moran that the journey into the heart of the deep dark woods had revealed and brought to the surface (which Sebastian himself was just beginning to acknowledge). Others which had *always* been there had surely been noticed by a certain little voyeur with pitch-black eyes while stalking him...

An obvious exhibitionist streak for instance, and the fact that there wasn't much Sebastian felt self-conscious about, certainly not anything sexual.

So, had Jim expected him to feel humiliated or awkward or even just uneasy about this?

Lustful exhilaration shone in Sebastian's eyes as they flashed up, seeing that indescribable expression on Jim's face: rapture, surprise... shock? Whatever it was, it was covered up with the half-bored (yet sweetly impatient) order to carry on.

Sebastian smiled, his gaze trailing along Jim's body - supine and decadently decorated with the remnants of a creamy desert.

“This seems to me –“ his voice dropped to a purr as well, “...not the most suitable position to make demands...”

Preparation accomplished, as good as it would get, he leaned forward on his arm some more, shifting his knees, positioning himself. Guiding Jim's cock, sliding its head over his slick entrance...

“But you know...” He let himself down gradually, eyes half closed, concentrating, feeling the pressure. His breath caught in his throat and then, with a low sound, he exhaled, his fingers digging into the carpet...

There...

He felt his muscles give... *fuck*... still a tight fit...

The first bit - the worst part, the *best*...

there was some pain – but it was *good*, glorious... the kind that... *God*... he groaned softly, paused, pushed down some more. Halfway there. No helping hand necessary any more, he placed it on Jim's other side, trying to find that thought again where he'd left off...

“Maybe... " there was a catch in his voice as he sank down yet a bit further “- that's just your way of admitting how much you *want* to be underneath me.”
Jim was about to snap at the comment about a suitable position for demands... but suddenly Sebastian was looming over him - and that was a sight he never expected to see (so soon at least, if he were honest with himself). And no, Sebastian might not be penetrating him, but there was some serious jostling for dominance happening. He needed to do something to show - to show -

But ohhh, too late, he felt his cock skimming over slickness, and then breaching Sebastian's body.

And Sebastian was still talking, still in that low seductive voice... *fuck...* Jim bit his lip as he felt Sebastian's body close over him like hot, tight fist. He suppressed a gasp as he felt Sebastian sliding down, down... slowly... adjusting and then moving further... ... Sebastian groaned, and this time a small gasp did escape his lips... downdowndown he continued, and then spoke again. Jim listened to his words as though through a haze as Sebastian's descent continued. What did he- ? he thought, dazedly. *What?*

It was perhaps unfortunate timing that Sebastian reached the end and pushed down firmly against his cock at that moment, because Jim's response was to squeeze his eyes shut and moan loudly as it if were being dragged from him.

Then his eyes flew open, and Jim glared up at him. "Honey," he panted. "What do think all this is about? Show me what you've got, and I'll consider it," he said in a dangerous, purring voice. "Because trust me... you do *not* want to go any further with this little flirtation if you don't have serious game."

His eyes glinted and he laughed low in his throat. "Fancy yourself a predator, Tiger? Do you want to hurt me? Do you want to *hurt me*?" His hands grasped Sebastian's hips, and he thrust up into him, making him groan.

~

God, what a sight: Jim underneath him, his eyes losing focus at that moment... *that moment*, which had them both groaning... Jim, clearly about to say something and then just gasping, his eyes closing, as Sebastian ground down... Who was penetrating who was suddenly a petty detail, dwindling into insignificance, not the defining *point* in this exquisite little power play…

Then the dark eyes opened again, something not to be *fucked with* stirring in their black depths. The dangerous drop, the deceptive purr in Jim's voice made Sebastian very aware of how thin the ice was he was skating on here. (Scanning the vicinity for potential weapons he might need to quickly chuck out of Jim's reach, he clocked a dessert spoon.) But something not to be *fucked with* was still just simmering for now… and Sebastian could not stop his little flirtation any more than he could stop breathing...

Did he fancy himself a predator?
"Oh, but I am...” He leaned closer. Jim might have made him his predator, he might have made him roll over, and he might well be the only man on earth who could, but – “Tigers and their stripes... remember?” he whispered hoarsely, answering the thrust of Jim's hips with one of his own, and then answering the string of further question with a hard kiss.

Oh yes, there were a lot of things he wanted, but also, he could do so many things that maybe Jim wanted deep down...

A dark, low sound from his throat vibrated into the kiss at the next thrust from Jim and a bruisingly hard grip on his hips. Sebastian pushed back, again.

He focused intently on every reaction from Jim... every delicious sound... every sign of what did it for him. He could do things that would have Jim shaking and delirious with pleasure. Or...? He might just focus on his own... As he did now, breaking the kiss and pushing himself back up. Readjusting his position, closing one hand around his cock, hot and hard between them. Then he leaned back a bit more, so with a slow roll of his hips the pressure inside him slightly shifted, brushing against the spot that was …...fuck... so good ... just right. His muscles tightened around Jim's cock. With a groan his head fell back a little, his half-closed eyes still intently fixed on Jim's.

~

Jim's breath caught in his throat as Sebastian, leaned over him, whispering.

Well, it was settled... this was a terrible idea, and would need to be rectified.

(After...) the little voice purred.

After, Jim conceded, his eyes on Sebastian's as he leaned down and kissed him.

He quickly took control of the kiss, his tongue pushing past Sebastian's lips, at the same as he thrust up into him. Sebastian groaned into his mouth, and pushed back.

Oh, it's like that, is it... Jim thought, smugly.

And then he thought nothing at all as Sebastian's muscles squeezed around his cock, and it took all the focus he had to not moan loudly at the sensation.

And then the kissing stopped, and Jim's eyes fluttered open in surprise.

He stared up at Sebastian who rose up, and slowly moved his hand to his cock. As he stroked, he
pushed against Jim's pelvis. God... the sight of him...

his head falling back, his eyes gazing at Jim as he pleasured himself.

Should I stop this? he thought in a daze. I didn't give permission for this...

But then he realized... this was the first time something sexual was happening to him that he wasn't directing or controlling... it was just... happening...

and it was rather intoxicating.

Jim wasn't fucking Sebastian.

They were fucking each other. And it was blindingly, achingly good.

Interesting, Jim thought, his hands slowly moving from Sebastian's hips to his arse.

Very... interesting...

His hands gripped his soldier's arse, and pulled him hard against his cock. They groaned in unison, and Jim's eyes blazed up at Sebastian.

Ohhh... he thought. So... good...

"Fuck... Tiger..." he growled, and thrust up again.

~

Even if his life had depended on it, Sebastian could not have torn his eyes away from Jim, glorious, beautiful, dishevelled Jim – that face, which never revealed any emotion other than that which Jim Moriarty chose to let you see, or chose to gleefully display- but god, to see it now...

Even at that moment Sebastian knew it was impossible to clearly read it. But the fleeting wisps of emotions that his eyes and foggy mind did catch made him feel downright dizzy...

calculation – consternation – conflict – amazement – fuckit – just - pure mindless pleasure - a shot of delicious aggression -

And then, Jim growling his name - his new name – sent an even more acute, breathtaking streak of heat straight to Sebastian's groin, same as the possessive grip on his arse and the cock thrusting up inside him. His eyelids fluttered, but never closed... And with increasingly ragged breaths he gave back as good as he got, his movements growing more forceful. Not faster. Pacing himself... pacing
Jim... with Jim reciprocating.

And somehow, before this turned into a serious struggle for dominance, it had tipped over into something more like a game. One that was not really about who was in charge...

Neither of them was. And both of them were.

Moving against each other. Moving with each other.

They were in this together, and - the thought flitted through Sebastian's mind and lit up a feral glint in his eyes – he'd have carpet burns on his knees after this, but Jim would certainly have them on his arse. That beautiful, tight, firm...

'Fuuuck...' Sebastian groaned, and his free hand moved from the carpet to Jim's hip, and up, through the mess of lube and cream, slowly, across his abdomen to his chest. There his fingers curled, his nails digging slightly into smooth skin and firm muscle. Then harder. And... still... a... bit... more.

Breaking some of the Rules.

While honouring the imperative one.

His hand slid down to the base of his cock, giving himself a short, hard squeeze, closing his eyes briefly. Panting.

He would Not. Come. First.

Then he lifted himself up a bit, feeling the delicious drag of Jim's cock, then ground down again.

“Told me to imagine how it would be...” he murmured, leaning down, closer to Jim's face. Another move, a sharp inhale... “Fucking God, I do...”

'In and out' Jim had said, hadn't he? Hmmm... Another thrust, controlled, powerful, the muscles of his abdomen tense... like urging a horse forward – 'ride my cock' had been the order if he remembered correctly... and Jesus bloody Christ he fucking did, ramping up the pace, and his beautiful mount seemed to fly towards the final furlong...

~

Jim panted as he thrust into Sebastian and felt responsive thrusting back. Soon there was a rhythm established, and not one Jim was controlling. For the very first time, it felt like his body had taken over... his and his partner's...

Sebastian groaned and it was the hottest fucking thing. He felt a reciprocal groan building in his throat, and clenched his jaw. Keep it together, Moriarty... just until you come, and then you can re-establish - fuckfuckFUCK... Sebastian was digging his nails into his chest, and the sudden flash of pain was SoGoodTooGood...

Jim groaned loudly.
Sebastian slid up and down on his cock, and Jim's eyelids fluttered shut briefly. He bit his lip at his words. *Oh God, so do I, FuckIWantIt...*

And then suddenly Sebastian was riding his cock hard and fast, and Jim finally lost control. He arched, threw his head back, and continued to thrust his cock into the tight, slick heat of Sebastian's arse.

"Bloody fucking - *Christ,*" he howled, and then as if a switch was flicked, he felt his body lose control Jim shivered and shook violently, moaning like a shameless tramp, he thought to himself, but he didn't care, he didn't care, oh god so good so good so good so good....

~

Sebastian saw it, ... saw Jim hanging on to some semblance of control by the skin of his teeth, saw it slipping and then... it was gone, with a howl of rage - rapture - pleasure – then he was swept along by a roaring tidal wave of *WantNowNeedYouFuckingGodComeHere. And. It. Was. Fucking. Divine.* - nothing left to hold on to any more but each other -

... pushing, panting, clawing...

The sounds escaping from Jim's throat surged through Sebastian as physically as the trembling of his muscles and finally - Jim bucking up against him, *into* him, heat spilling inside him...

And for a pinpoint moment in time he saw, really *saw* ... Jim's face, entirely without a mask – open, raw, naked, and beautiful.

Making a helpless sound, Sebastian leaned forward even more, still riding Jim through the delicious aftershocks of his orgasm. Two perfunctory strokes to Sebastian’s cock were more than enough to send him off into an epic orgasm of his own –

…

For a while there was only their ragged breathing, gradually slowing, calming down.

Slumped down over Jim, luckily Sebastian found himself still lucid enough to keep at least part of his weight on one elbow, and one hand. Even to slightly turn his head took some effort. Hair tickled his cheek.

“So, did you imagine it as well?” His mouth was close to Jim's ear, his voice low, still slightly breathy. “Like that,” he murmured, “Just... like that...”

He considered briefly cleaning up the mess he’d left when he came… but ah well, in the face of the glorious almighty mess they were lying in, it seemed absurd to worry about that.

He dipped his head and licked a smear of cream off Jim's shoulder.
Jim found himself floating in a daze before he realized where he actually was - on the floor, his back feeling scraped by the expensive carpet... now sticky with cream, as was he... along with sweat and semen, compliments of Sebastian... who was leaning over him, gasping and panting. Jim had a dim recollection of the sound of their orgasms piercing the air like animals... not sweet domestic fluffy ones, but the dangerous kind... wild things, in a frenzy of fucking. Jim’s eyes closed as he processed everything that just happened. None of it according to plan...

What the fuck was he supposed to -

The thought was interrupted by a question from a Tiger who seemed awfully pleased with himself.

He suppressed a shiver at the seductive-predator voice purring in his ear. If they hadn’t just fucked, he would have expected teeth at his throat. Instead he felt his tongue gliding along his shoulder, and this time the shiver broke free.

Jim’s eyes opened slowly and locked with Sebastian’s. “Not even a little afraid of the territory, are you? I’m not sure if that’s stupidly brave or bloody reckless...” he said in a soft purring voice. They stared at each other for a long, hushed moment. Then Jim arched an eyebrow. “Huh. To be determined...” He didn’t bother to specify if that was regarding being fucked by Sebastian... or determining if he was brave or reckless for taunting him with the prospect.

Jim breathed in deeply. The room was thick with pheromones, musky-sweet masculine scents... and strawberries. Jim turned his head and saw a strawberry crushed into the carpet next to his head. He picked it up with a mildly irritated expression and flicked it at Sebastian’s head. The quick bastard ducked, of course, and Jim sighed.

“Honestly, though... can you enter any room without leaving evidence of your presence?” he grumbled. “Get off. I need yet another shower, thanks to you...”

Sebastian sensed the slight shiver running over Jim's skin, but he didn't see it. Head bowed, eyes still closed, he drank in Jim's scent... their scent, like imprinting on something that had been missing all his life, without him even knowing.

Jim's eyes opened. The deceptively soft voice didn't fool him for a second, as Jim mused about Sebastian rambling into minefields – again, and seemingly without fear.
“I’m not stupid,” Sebastian replied. Because, to be entirely without fear in general (and around Jim Moriarty in particular), you had to be exactly that: either blissfully ignorant or blatantly stupid.

Bloody reckless he’d been labeled before, but it wasn't quite that simple...

What was he, then?

Definitely hardwired to turn fear and danger into something like the fix of a powerful drug, but with enough sense and instinct attached, to (so far) come out of everything alive. And now... obviously so smitten with a lethal despotic psychopath that maybe, for once, he had stopped caring if he did survive the high.

The corner of his mouth twitched as Jim conceded the matters in question had yet to be determined.

Yes, maybe the verdict would be 'plain stupidity' but that didn't particularly faze Sebastian (since from Jim's point of view, 99.9% of the world's population was the intellectual equivalent of a vegetable).

He ducked quick enough for a mangled strawberry to pass over his head (and defile the carpet further afield). Wryly he noted it had been thrown by the man who asked him if he was capable of not leaving evidence of his presence…

“Hm –” Sebastian briefly pondered the question. “I usually don't when I kill people?” he offered.

When ordered to 'get off' he complied with a grin - not objecting but also not displaying undue haste. He surveyed the battlefield. God – everyone and everything needed a serious hosing down – but it had been worth it, hadn’t it? He didn't say that out loud, as the big smile on his face spoke for itself. He extended a hand to help Jim up and onto his feet.

~

Jim eyed the hand that was offered to him, then took it. Rising gracefully, he shook it off - then stepping around bits of cream and a stray strawberry with a pointed glare, he made his way across the living room carpet.

Walking naked and sticky and dishevelled to the shower was unusual enough - somehow he had always managed to stay somewhat tidy even during sex - but to be escorted by someone else... this was a whole other level of rare. Jim stopped himself from glancing at Sebastian, who had caught up to him and was walking with him instead of behind.

It was a good thing they were working apart tomorrow, he told himself. This had already gotten far too cozy. Well, it was already evening... after their shower (their?), he would do some more work, and then make it an early night. Then in the morning, Tiger would be off a-killing, and things would
go back to normal.

As they climbed the stairs, Jim pictured pushing Sebastian out the door in the morning. It felt strangely empty. He then pictured pushing him off the platform of a tube station... into the path of an oncoming lorry... off a cliff... into a volcano... and none of his fun, frisky fantasies gave him any pleasure. Well, a tiny bit - he wasn't dead inside.

What the fuck, Moran, he thought in annoyance, as Sebastian opened the bathroom door for him, and made an 'after you' gesture. Are you trying to be so charming I can't do without you?? Fat fecking chance of that, darling...

He slipped into the bathroom, blasted hot water, and stepped under the spray. He watched as white and red water swirled off him, and then felt Sebastian get in behind him. It felt thrilling and familiar at once...

*This won't do,* he told himself firmly. *Take care of it.*

~

The smudges of strawberries and cream washed off under the blast of hot water, but not the slightly reddish marks on the beautiful arse in front of him... and, standing close behind Jim in the shower, Sebastian found it hard to pry his eyes away from them.

There was beauty in their symmetry, and a glow of satisfaction in the thought of how they'd gotten there. Sebastian realised he was about to touch them, as if that would keep away the sting the hot water was bound to cause, but something made him stop himself from getting carried away. Why, when just minutes ago he'd had no qualms about laying hands on the man... and had done so with relish?

Just a subtle shift, but somewhere between there and here the atmosphere had changed.

Sebastian, only slowly coming out of the glow and back to his senses, couldn't quite put his finger on what exactly felt ... off, but now he did: Jim was silent. And that was a first, post-fuck.

Not that he'd assume to know what went on inside Jim's mind, but there was an air of... not so much contentedness, but withdrawal. And Sebastian had seen that before – Jim on his laptop, or pondering a problem in the car, or, for the blink of an eye even in the middle of meetings. Jim's mind would briefly step aside, out-side, as if to view a problem from a different angle.

And you did well to hope the matter in question had nothing to do with you.

Better to err on the side of caution, though...

So, taking care to only use whatever part of the spray he could catch without blocking it, Sebastian cleaned himself up, mindful to keep the bandage on his back dry. He was already towelled off, and counting out another dose of Keflex and Ibuprofen, when Jim finished his shower.
Sebastian handed him a towel, filled a glass of water and leaned against the counter, watching Jim. He reminded himself that, for all he knew, he was just here on a whim. On a Jim-whim to let a few proclivities out and run free and play to their heart's content, until they were sated. Now, with the prey hunted down, fucked and devoured it might well be the point where the novelty wore off and they were starting to get distracted or irritated. Or worse: bored.

He shoved a hand through his hair. *Fuck's sake Moran, don't make a big thing out of this!*

"I better be off then, I guess," he suggested casually. Well, he *hoped* it sounded casual enough, and not as bleak as his own suggestion made him feel.

The vigorous towelling of messy dark hair stopped for a second and Sebastian couldn't quite place the look that was shot at him. He gave a slight shrug, and despite himself, the corners of his mouth quirked up slightly.

"Just my Scheherezade instincts..." he murmured. And they were quite good. The king clearly needed a bit of me-time…

Sebastian popped the pills from his hand into his mouth and washed them down, watching Jim over the rim of the glass.

~

At Sebastian's words, Jim stopped short, looked up quickly at Sebastian, then continued drying himself off.

What the fuck-?

*Scheherazade?*

You think you get to choose? he thought furiously, then tamped down on his anger.

"Well, Sebastian... you're hardly chained up here... at the moment," he said coolly, and dried his face. "If you want to leave..."

Then he threw the towel across the room, and stepped towards him. He plucked the glass out of his hand and threw it into the sink. Ignoring the smashing of glass and water splashing, he stepped even closer and looked up at him.

"Just a question, first... did Scheherazade say, 'oh hey, your Royal Fucking Majesty... I think I'll take off... you're getting quiet' he said in an injured feminine voice. "Funny, I don't remember that part of
the story... sometimes Kings get quiet, darling... there's a lot on their shoulders, after all. And the psychopathic ones, well, they have their little moods..."

He glanced at the large shards of glass in the sink, and raised his eyebrows. "Mustn't make the mistake of thinking it's all about you. The moods were here a long time before you arrived on the scene..."

He swiped up a jagged piece of glass from the sink. Sebastian made a sound in his throat.

"It's all right," Jim said in a soothing voice. "Give me your hand..."

Sebastian hesitated only for a moment before he stretched out his hand. Jim took it gently and held it palm up. He pressed the tip of glass shard to the mound at the base of his thumb, then pushed down. He watched with interest as Sebastian winced, and then stared at the blood that welled up.

"I carved my mark into your back. Did you forget that? Maybe you need something you can look at more easily..."

Jim pressed harder, and more blood pooled. He removed the glass and threw it against the other shards with a clink. He held the hand up to his face, and licked the blood slowly.

He closed his eyes and exhaled. "You're mine. I made you mine. Get used to the moods, darling..." he opened his eyes and stared at him intently.

Then he picked up another piece of glass, this one smaller. And he stared at Sebastian for a beat longer before bringing the shard to the same spot on his own palm. and digging the glass into it deeply. He tossed the glass into the sink, and held his bleeding hand out to Sebastian.

"I wasn't at risk of forgetting, Tiger. Here. I'm right here. Taste it. And remember it well..." he murmured.

~

Jim doing voices was hilarious and profoundly creepy at the same time – especially while advancing on Sebastian, taking the glass from his hand and smashing it into the sink... nothing for feeble nerves to be witnessed here...

Sebastian blinked, but stood his ground - the countertop at his back might have had something to do with it as well – and bracing himself against the surge of adrenaline and a lick of annoyance, he let it dissipate without moving a muscle. No, of course, Jim was right - that particular king's playmate had
been in no position to take her leave.

“True, but at least she knew she was supposed to stay,” he pointed out, wisely not adding, 'because they were married.' “But how the fuck am I supposed to know?”

Last night it had just been a pretext of purely practical considerations that had allowed him to stay. Because this was not a fucking honeymoon.

Nothing to get ideas about.

Oh yes, Jim could rest assured, the information on what this was not had been very clear.

Sebastian stared into his eyes, with the sudden realisation that he was hoping for this incident to not be something else, as well: a one-off. And to outstay one's welcome usually didn't promote the chances to be invited back. After all: he was quite aware of the moods of the regal little psychopath, which were now being pointed out to him with a good deal of irritation.

“I’m just trying to pick my way through...” he said softly. “Through... this.”

Without bloody knowing what this was.

Fucking hell, without even asking what it was.

And it was just now that he got some sort of answer.

At the sight of a jagged piece of glass in Jim's hand, everything ground into slow motion.

Soothing words and then... firm ones. Decisive.

But he couldn't process them for a moment, didn't dare to... because they might just be a feverish, breathless hallucination of what he wished to hear. Craved to hear, and if he believed them...

A jab of pain jolted through him and jerked him back into surreal clarity.

His eyes, which had briefly flickered down to his hand and the first well of blood, found Jim's again, and after that never left.

Not while his pupils dilated as the shard cut open the heel of his thumb.

Not while Jim reminded him.

Not while his breathing got quicker and shallower as the glass pressed deeper into the wound.
And not while it ceased to matter completely, whether it was his hand Jim slashed open, or his wrist…

Mine

I made you mine.

Forget pinching yourself as a reality check… God, he'd go for a knife or a shard of glass pressed into his flesh in a heartbeat, if it were done by this beautiful fucking psychopath…

Sebastian couldn't stifle a moan when suddenly Jim's lips and tongue where on the wound and at the sight of them coming away bloody. He stared in a daze when Jim cut open his own hand and then held it out to him.

Blood welled up, seeping along the sliver of glass, pooling in the palm of his hand. Then slowly running down one finger… And before the first drop could fall, Sebastian, dipping his head, caught it with his tongue. What followed was inevitable… like what was set in motion a few hours ago by the little marble ball tipping over.

Sebastian had taken hold of Jim's hand and his tongue traced the thin trail of blood back towards its source, just as slowly as he was lowering himself towards the floor.

When finally his teeth grazed against the cut, and the tip of his tongue dipped into it, tasting it, he was down on his knees.

I wasn't at risk of forgetting either, sir.

Here.

I'm right here.

~

Jim watched silently, his face not betraying his feelings.

His feelings... as if he were a mere ordinary human with their endless ordinary emotions...

only... there was nothing ordinary about what was happening.

God... from the moment Jim pulled out the broken glass, Sebastian had been staring at him like one would gaze at their king or their god. As if he were falling deeper and deeper into a trance, like the victim falling under the thrall of a serpent or a vampire...

Vampire... fitting, with Jim's propensity for drinking blood... whatever had possessed him to give his
own to Sebastian?

He stopped his eyes from closing as he felt Sebastian's tongue and then teeth on his bleeding palm.

Now it was Jim falling into a trance...

as he watched Sebastian falling to his knees as though in slow-motion.

An eternal moment of a subject swearing fealty to his king...

falling in adoration of his god...

offering himself completely to the predator before him...

Jim inhaled sharply, and stared down at Sebastian gazing up at him...

those bright blue eyes...

swearing loyalty and devotion and surrender...

without a single word uttered.

Jim took his face in his hands, and stared at him for a long moment, then leaned down and kissed him long and hard.

"Don't be an idiot... you're not going anywhere," he said firmly.

He gestured at Sebastian to stand, then grinned at him, breaking the spell. "Now you know you're supposed to stay, Scheherazade... all better?"

He rolled his eyes.

"Jesus... if I had known what a pain in the arse Tigers are, I would have whipped you harder... something to keep in mind for next time..."

He arched an eyebrow. "Now... if we're done with all the Romeo and Juliet madness, get something to entertain yourself then get your arse into the bedroom... I'm doing some more work and then making it an early night."

As he left the room, he called back sarcastically, "Did you hear that, Tiger? I said next time..."

~

Sebastian didn't think. Jim's blood on his tongue - the sweet, smoky taste of hot metal and crimson darkness - not drawn in a fight, not spilled in a frenzied bout of biting, kissing, fucking, but solemnly given, like a kingly favour – where else would you receive it but on your knees?
Books of kingly tales had depicted the king leaning down, taking the face of the man swearing fealty, and kissing him...

admittedly not

like

that...

And he wouldn't be kissed back as fiercely as Sebastian was doing now.

He assumed that the swearing of fealty didn't end with an offhand wave to get the fuck up and the ceremonial uttering 'Don't be an idiot.'

Jim grinned and amusement sparked in Sebastian's eyes.

“Yes... better,” he replied, smiling.

Especially because of the king's musings about what he should do... next time.

Barely taking note of Jim's orders regarding the further course of the evening, something inside him just kept happily humming... next time...

When Jim had already left the bathroom, Sebastian still had that half-dazed, half-pleased little grin on his face.

Oh yes, he'd heard.

Next time...

He turned the tap, cleaned his hand and bandaged the cut. Picking up pieces of glass and throwing them away, he looked more closely. The impact of the glass had chipped a small slab of porcelain off the inside of the luxurious wash basin. Ah well - time to tick off another room now sporting a permanent mark of his presence...

~

As Jim wandered down the stairs to retrieve his laptop, he considered the events that just transpired, feeling strangely flushed.

Idiot, he chided himself. Why are you being so... demonstrative?

(Because he's so sweet...) the little voice chirped.
Exactly what I need... a sweet bodyguard... Jim rolled his eyes, as he reached the bottom of the stairs and headed for the living room.

(And he likes you...) the voice cooed.

Jim felt himself growing agitated. My sweet bodyguard likes me... fuck's sake... he thought, then froze as he entered the living room.

It looked as if a hurricane had torn through the apartment and blown food in from the kitchen. There were open food containers and used plates all over the table, but the bigger issue was the dessert decorating the carpet.

Jim groaned. He opened his mouth to yell Sebastian's name, then sighed and started cleaning up. He needed a moment to himself to think anyway, and Sebastian would likely be coming through in a few minutes to throw rare books into a messy heap on the library floor.

Gingerly, he stepped around the smears of cream and the flattened strawberry. He started carrying containers to the kitchen, and stacking them in the fridge. Image sprang unbidden to his mind... Sebastian riding him on the carpet, whispering to him... Sebastian on his knees in the bathroom, eyes shining...

(And you like him, too...) the little voice taunted him.

Jesus... he snapped. Enough with the smitten schoolgirl antics!

(Sssssay it...)

Piss off, or his invitation to return gets revoked! Jim closed the fridge door emphatically, and returned for the plates.

As he returned to the kitchen in silence, he felt himself begin to relax.

(Saaaaay it!) the voice sang abruptly.

"Jesus! I. Fucking. Like. Him." he said through gritted teeth. Now drop it!
Jim threw the plates into the sink, grabbed a tea towel, and ran it under hot water for a moment. The carpet would obviously need to be thrown out tomorrow, but if he left it with food on it all night, he’d be too furious to sleep.

He hesitated for a moment with a wet towel in his hand, dripping onto the kitchen floor. He thought again of Sebastian's face growing lighter after he kissed him. Smiling after he told him he wasn’t going anywhere...

He exhaled slowly. It was a dangerous game he was playing now... the rules had shifted partway, and he had somehow lost control of the board and the players... but he was the one calling the shots, and it would not happen again.

*You hear that?* he demanded of the smug little voice, lurking in the background. *I'M the one who controls the game... NOT. YOU.* He stormed into the living room, and furiously started wiping down the carpet.

(You think what you like, honey...) the voice purred, as he cleaned. (But there's a beautiful Tiger in bed, thanks to me. And I plan to enjoy him...)

No. *I'm doing some work and having an early night,* Jim informed the voice loftily. Ignoring the silky laughter, he threw the tea towel on the table. Then he snatched up his laptop and headed back upstairs.

~

Cleaning the wash basin until it was spotless again, Sebastian paused and gazed at the man in the big mirror, covering the wall. The guy was clearly a bloody lunatic. Looking like he’d just come out of a war - scratches and welts, sodden bandages around his wrists and a fresh one on his hand, the distinct shadow of a bruise on his jaw and one over his hip bone... old scars, and cuts that would turn into new ones... and yet – in his eyes of tumultuous blue a vibrant light shone. And on his lips there was not only a smear of blood but a fucking smile.

His finger traced the grainy spot chipped by the glass and he pictured the holy mess the living room must be in. The idea of joining Jim there was taken under review though, when nearing the kitchen – the fridge was being shut with a thump, then there was the harsh clatter of plates being thrown into the sink - from what, a mile away? - water running and muttering. Sebastian's ears perked up as his limbs froze from slow motion into stillness, before he opted for a smooth retreat – to the library. After all – there was no shortage of messes to apply himself to...

But righting books on their shelves and picking them up from the floor, his concentration left much to be desired because of what he'd heard on his way in... *mis*heard surely?

Oh, get a grip on yourself! No reason to feel so elated, he chided himself, picking up a tome that had
landed face down - *Ptolemy's Geographia*. He shoved a few continents that had come loose back where they belonged. Yes, that must be it: one of Jim's funny little jokes (who no one found funnier than the little bastard himself). Because, seriously: who the fuck talked to themselves sounding like an aside on stage, unless they expected an audience?!

And yet, it didn't help - he kept smiling while restoring some sort of order in the library and then heading back upstairs, and then after a cigarette on the balcony - into bed. Following orders. Although strictly speaking they did not include using more than half the bed to sprawl out comfortably, or swapping the pillows to secretly be closer to Jim's scent.

Before he’d as much as opened the book he’d brought with him, he was fast asleep, the faint scent of luxurious hair wash and *Jim* against his cheek.

~

As Jim clomped upstairs with his laptop, he considered what to complain about first... the state of the living room? The fact that Sebastian didn't help clean it up? How little Jim had accomplished today? He was raring to go by the time he reached the bedroom, and threw open the door. When he stepped through, he stared at the sight before him.

Sebastian was sleeping - sprawled on his side across the bed, his long limbs spread out, his arm around Jim's pillows. His face was peaceful... content, even.

Jim's mouth snapped shut. Well, he could wake him up for a firm talking to... but as he moved towards the bed, he let go of his resolve. Fuck it - there'd be plenty of time to berate him whenever he returned next. Strange to think he'd be leaving tomorrow...

Jim sat in bed and opened up his laptop. But the thought of doing any more work felt dull - which should have been disconcerting, but he couldn't muster up enough energy to give a flying fuck. He turned his laptop off with a sigh, and slid it onto his bedside table. Then he settled into bed against the pillows. The problem was Sebastian was taking up most of the bed - so he either had to sleep crammed against the edge of the bed, which was not going to happen... or wake him up to tell him to sod off and move over.

He pushed at Sebastian's shoulder - it was like pushing a tree. Jesus. He shook his arm, and said loudly,

"Move over, Sebastian... or I'll have a nice tiger-skin rug in front of the fireplace..."

Sebastian muttered something that sounded like "OK, beautiful..." and moved an inch back. Jim stared at him in shock. Did he even know who he was talking to??

Was Jim beautiful?

*Obviously*..
Did he get to call Jim 'Beautiful'?

_Definitely not._

(I like it...) the voice protested.

"Piss _off_," Jim hissed, and began to push Sebastian back again.

To which his soldier responded with a chuckle, before easing back further.

"Fuck's sake, Sebastian..." Jim muttered, then lay down next to him. He stared at him in irritated fascination, then sighed and turned to face the other direction.

Tomorrow Sebastian was leaving... and things would go back to normal. _About time_, he thought and had the distinct sensation that his little voice was sulking and refusing to speak to him. He ignored the twingey feeling in his stomach, and closed his eyes.

~

God, he loved Jim manhandling him, and he was too sleepy to even _pretend_ otherwise. A feeling of amusement permeated through the haze and the corners of Sebastian's mouth twitched. More than half asleep, he inched back a tiny bit, but it wasn't more than token compliance.

Juuust barely enough to avoid getting turned into a rug for the fireplace.

Of course Jim was beautiful – he was the most fucking beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

What, he didn't like that? Well... tough - sleepy tigers (not in full possession of their faculties) were very prone to tell the truth. The bed dipped beside him and, ceding another inch, Sebastian exhaled with a soft rumbling noise. His eyes never opened...

"I know you like me", he mumbled, with a sleepy-content smile on his face.

~
Jim’s heart pounded in his chest. He thought about what Sebastian had mumbled at him... it wasn’t snarky, which would have been the kiss of death for his darling soldier. Instead he sounded chuffed as hell.

*Fecking wonderful,* he thought, disgruntled. He *heard* me... what was he doing sneaking around so quietly??

Something. Had. To be. Done.

He’d been telling himself this all day, and his tarty side had bollixed everything up. Even gave Sebastian his blood and referred to them as fecking Romeo and Juliet! Now Sebastian was ignoring orders and calling him 'beautiful'!

(I like being called Beautiful...) the little voice called out sulkily.

Jim ignored this. Tomorrow. Deal with it tomorrow. Even if it means telling Steve to assign him elsewhere. Or transfer him to work out of the fecking country. If he wanted to, he need never see Sebastian Moran ever again. He huffed, and ignored the feeling of darkness radiating from his stomach, the agitated feeling in his chest. He tried to get comfortable and punched his pillow.

Then a large arm snaked around his waist. His eyes flew open.

What-?

He pushed back against it, but it stayed where it was.

"Sleep, Jim..." Sebastian mumbled drowsily.

Jim blinked in response, then sighed heavily. The annoying bloody Tiger had a point. He could figure all this out in the morning.

For now, he clearly needed sleep...

Jim's eyelids started sagging. The arm around his waist was strangely comforting.

Stupid Tiger, he grumbled to himself, and nestled against the strong, wonderful arm.

Darkness surrounded him, and he surrendered.
Sebastian's eyelids fluttered, as part of his mind tried to drag itself back from drowsiness - but the more insistent part demanded *lights out, now*. His left hand slowly moved and his arm slid around Jim's waist, like a big paw gently immobilising a fidgety kitten.

A wave of shocked indignation radiated up from underneath it... but, after a fruitless push, it gradually eased off. Breathing slowed down. Sebastian's sleep-addled mind was quite certain Jim snuggled into the touch, and, drifting into oblivion, he took that lovely thought into the darkness with him...

It was still there in the grey half-light of the morning seeping through the blinds. With eyes still closed and a tiny smile, Sebastian allowed himself to soak it up shamelessly. Recalling Jim's reaction waking up yesterday morning, caution crept back in too, but he'd happily risk a black eye or a scratch across his face, to just... savour it a bit longer. Along with the memories of everything that had happened in the space of a day and two nights. Looking at the Sebastian Moran who'd stepped through these doors on Friday night, was like gazing at a former version of himself across a lifetime spanning thirty-six hours. He opened his eyes and looked at the sleeping man who had left more marks on him, inside and out, than the last thirty-six years.

And nothing had ever felt this... *right*.

However, enough of his common sense was still intact to know he'd not been hired, and wouldn't be kept around just because he was a good lay and fitted Jim Moriarty's sexual preferences like a glove.

He had a man to kill today, and no matter how easy or difficult a hit was supposed to be, he never set about it half-arsed.

Today, though – he didn't even know more than the vague outlines yet. No recce the day before, no detailed planning, no tuning into the task and the target. So - no matter how bullet-proof (hah) the information and instructions were that he was used to getting from Steve, it was more than high time to get going.

He briefly contemplated waking Jim up, but then... he had no idea how to take his leave. 'Bye now, honey, see you tonight' (except, no, he wouldn't). So instead of getting a pitying glance as the gormless idiot who started to get ideas, or an indifferent send-off wave to sod off already, he much preferred to take *this* final moment with him: Jim's relaxed, sleeping body under his arm (it seemed they both hadn't moved an inch during the night), breathing peacefully, the shadow of dark lashes on pale cheeks...

*Oh fuck off Tiger* – he could literally hear it - *enough with the Romeo-and-Juliet madness*, go do your job.

And so he would…
Slowly, quietly, he eased his arm back, and moved to the side, out from under the duvet and even more quietly out of the bed. He retrieved his phone from his jacket on the chair and opened the email drafts folder where he duly found yesterday’s entry from Steve.

Then he looked over his shoulder - the sleeping form in the bed still didn't stir, so, clothes in one hand, phone in the other, Sebastian tiptoed out of the room. After a quick trip to the bathroom he went down to the kitchen and dressed while the machine gurgled out a coffee. Gingerly he inched into his T-Shirt, his back hurting like a bitch at every movement, and fucking hell - due to no wearable underpants anywhere in sight the denim of his jeans chafed against all parts sensitive – which was about everything they came in contact with. That too would be staying with him all day - with a tingle of heat coursing through him at the thought, he grinned, sipping his coffee.

His eyes fell on a notepad with pen, attached to the side of the fridge.

Should he write a note?

‘Back for dinner. With strawberry trifle’

Good heavens. He felt a tickle of insane laughter in his throat, realising he was already holding the pen and had started a little doodle - two ears, a few stripes, whiskers.

He finished his coffee, and, good tiger that he was, rinsed the mug, and also put a fresh one out. Then he quietly left, pulling the front door shut behind him with a gentle click.

~

Jim woke up, murmuring. He had no idea what he'd been saying, but in his dream there was a magpie hiding something - a treasure?- and squawking at him when he got too close.

Whatever. Dream nonsense. Now where was Sebastian?

He looked behind him at the empty bed, and remembered - the sound of a Tiger getting up, gathering his things, and heading downstairs. Jim had considered opening his eyes, but what was he going to say to him? Thanks for the amazing sex, get out?

Only - Jim didn't say thank you as a rule... or give compliments... Which left nothing to say other than Get. Out.

Jim laughed at the thought of wandering downstairs in his dressing gown, to say only that before turning around and heading back to bed.

Jim was also a fan of an Irish exit, and did so regularly. Goodbyes, like all social niceties, were superfluous, sentimental drivel.

And it was a relief to be on his own again. As much as he had enjoyed Sebastian's company (!!!), it also chafed to be in the same space with someone. He'd been looking forward to having his space to
himself again...

But there was also something about waking up in an empty flat that felt... strange.

Almost like... that apparently common experience of going to bed with someone and having them pull a disappearing act in the morning. Only, it was not common to Jim, and he dismissed this with a roll of his eyes. Preposterous. He'd been calling the shots all along, and he didn't intend to stop now. Given how Sebastian had been staring at him all day, it was hardly likely.

And then - there was the arm...

The arm that had held him all night.

It was partly why he had been able to sleep in so late... he hadn't had such a good night's sleep as far back as he could remember. Any time he woke up agitated from a dream... the arm was there, protecting him... comforting him.

Jim stretched out, yawning, and rolled out of bed. Anyway. It was done. Time for things to get back to normal...

He would consult the bodyguard schedule and make sure he wasn't seeing too much of Mr. Moran, and that would be that.

There was a strange feeling in his stomach that he ignored. His little voice was strangely silent, too. It had been in hyperdrive ever since this ridiculous fascination with Sebastian had started.

Jim pulled on a dressing gown, and grabbed his laptop. Yawning, he headed downstairs. He found the coffeemaker all set up and ready to go, with a clean cup waiting for him on the counter. He pressed a button and heard the initial sounds of coffee brewing. Then he sat down with his laptop and got to work.

When the coffee was ready, he got up and poured himself a cup, with milk and a lot of sugar. It felt so strange to do anything for himself...

(I like Sebastian being here to do things...) the little voice pouted.

Jim covered his face with his hands. There it was.

Don't start up again... just don't...

(So sweet of him to set up the coffee maker for me...)

Yes, he's an excellent employee.... Jim thought crisply, and poured himself another cup.
(But why didn't he leave a note??)

Because we're not heart-eyed schoolgirls, he snapped.
He had the strangest sensation of whining and moping, then suddenly -

(Tiger! A tiger!)

A doodle of a tiger stared back at him from the notepad on the fridge.

"Fuck's sake, Sebastian..." he muttered. He eyed the little drawing on the notepad suspiciously as he took his coffee cup back to the laptop, and got to work.

~

Stepping back into the world was strange. Like after... being at the cinema in the middle of the day. Like waking up from a lucid dream that had felt more real than any waking moment.

Or leaving a deep dark wood and feeling compelled to turn around because suddenly it was being outside that made you feel lost.

Well, it most certainly hadn't been a dream – even the smallest movement testified to that. He felt light-headed, like riding a high after bingefing on a mindblowing drug, yet already feeling the first hollow, slightly nauseating twinge of withdrawal.

He realised he had shifted on the bike and moved his shoulder to... no, not to alleviate the pressure of the heavy leather jacket against his back, but to feel it. To savour all the physical reminders surging back, converging into a rush of pain-pleasure-thrill...

Oh fucking hell! Sebastian wrenched his mind back to the task as he spotted the expected silver Merc with driver (poor sod never got Sundays off) as it appeared, half past twelve on the dot, as scheduled.

The front door of the house in question opened, as Sebastian opened the throttle. He pulled off the kerb as the car pulled into the driveway (which was covered by a security camera, whereas that stretch of road was not). The driver got out and opened the boot – what the fuck, according to all observations he never did that! And then, instead of the target walking into a brief but certain
window for a leisurely drive-by shooting, the car was swarmed by seemingly everybody living in the house – wifey, brats and fucking dog …

Muttering a curse so vicious it literally threatened to fog up the visor of his helmet, Sebastian kept going, past the house and family piling luggage into the car for what seemed to be a trip into the green English countryside, without hubby.

In the mirror Sebastian caught a glimpse of another car, a flashy BMW convertible pulling out of the basement garage... Fuckfuckfuck...

'Nothing too strenuous' - he could still hear Jim's voice... '... as long as he doesn't make it to his meeting, it's your call how you do it.'

Alright. That left fifty-two minutes...

'Have fun with it, Tiger.'

It really looked like he would…

~

Jim was consumed by work to such an extent that he was not aware of how much time had passed until he felt a strange sensation in his stomach. What was that? Oh... hunger.

He looked down at his stomach, accusingly. This didn't normally happen... certainly not mid-day. He looked at the time on his laptop. One thirty. Should he... eat something? Seemed so indulgent...

He thought back to all the meals and snacks that had magically appeared with Sebastian in the house, and the next thing he knew he was padding to the kitchen and staring at the contents of the fridge. He poked at a container of leftover Thai food. He had meant to remind Sebastian to take it with him... but then, why not just pack a lunch for him? he thought, sneering. Or just appear wherever he was with a picnic basket?!

He rubbed his eyes and sighed. Well, he had made it through several hours without thinking of him.

How did the hit go, he wondered idly. He went to send a message to Steve, and then realised he'd forgotten to get something to eat. He stood halfway between the kitchen and the living room, exasperated. As soon as you started remembering you were human, things just got far too complicated...

Fuck it. If there was something wrong, Steve would have notified him.
He headed back towards the kitchen, then stopped.

But what if... something happened to Sebastian? He hurried back to his phone, cursing. Tersely, he sent a text to Steve.

Within a moment, there was a response - he hadn’t heard a confirmation from Sebastian yet. But there was a news report about a traffic incident on the potential route...

What. Incident.

He could see Steve writing more, but Jim was already sending a text to Sebastian:

_Incident??_

He started to pace, staring at his screen.

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